SELF PUBLISHER!™

★ MAGAZINE ★

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U CREATE COMICS!

JAMES LYLE INTERVIEW

COVER STORY

DRUNKEN CAT COMICS

REVIEWS INSIGHT & MORE!!!

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SELF PUBLISHER MAGAZINE

The Driving Force

You would think, after running Self Publisher! Magazine for a quarter of a century and the Self Publisher Association over a decade, that I would actually know what I am doing and what I'm talking about. But more and more, as I blunder my way through issue after issue, I am getting more and more convinced that things have changed so much, I simply do not. I am not sure if I should be saying this, admitting to it, whatever. However, I am going to try to take this revelation as a good thing. It means that I can stop viewing self-publishing through my memories of the past and start really addressing the world of today, with this magazine. And really, the focus of what we do still seems on target: Getting to know the people who make self-published stuff; why they do it, where it can be found, all that good stuff. Helping publishers really connect with their fans.

This issue, we present some really cool things. We're leading off with a look at Drunken Cat Comics... a company I've seen grow and change over the course of the last decade. If you ever have a chance to stop by their table at a show, make sure to do so; they are really fun people. Hopefully, our article can give you a glimpse of that. Also in this issue, our editor, Ellen, went to town—literally. She hit the Toronto Fan Expo and has articles this issue about her experience, and a couple of interviews that came about as a direct result, as well. We have additional interviews and articles, even a couple of reviews. Pretty happy with how it came together.

Next issue is the issue we did our targeted Kickstarter Project for, so we're going to be doing a printing of it, which will, hopefully, launch us into printing editions of SP! every month. We're going to open things up for subscription. See how that goes.

Meanwhile, I'm continuing work on the Self Publisher Hall of Fame presentation. Because, while this magazine looks to the present and future, I feel it's important we honor and preserve the past. And that's what life is all about.

—Ian Shires

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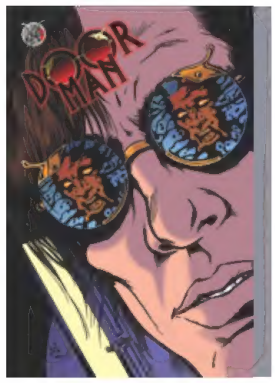

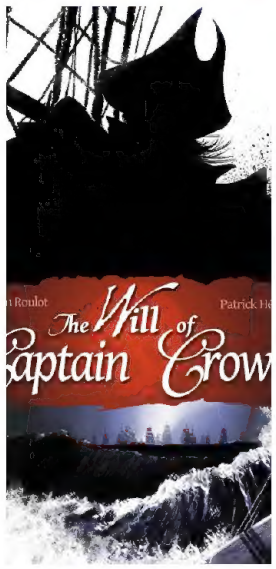

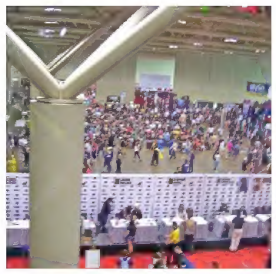

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Join the Self Publisher forums at: www.selfpubmag.com

Drunken Cats are more fun

By Ian Shires

I've been running into Brian and Derek at SPACE shows for well over a decade and have had the pleasure of enjoying multiple conversations with them over the years, as well as reviewing their comics as they have come out. My intention was to have someone else do this interview, because new eyes are always open wider when it comes to an interview. Things didn't quite work out that way, and so we tossed the following conversation together (which is all good, because I think it came out a bit more spontaneously this way). Sometimes you just gotta roll with it. And so, with no further ado... let's get to know the Drunken Cats better...

SP!: You've probably seen the publishing world change lately. We came up in a world where small press had focus and community. Where do you see things happening today?

Derek: Internet. There are so many online comics these days. Really, anyone who can move a pencil across a sheet of paper can find an audience. My Daily Shots are a testament to that.

Brian: I'm going to have to agree with Derek: the internet has opened the floodgates. There are some incredible comics online with some very talented people behind them. As far as community is concerned, social media sites like deviantArt and Tumblr are where it's at these days. Groups of people around the world from all walks of life are online, sharing their comics and reading other people's comics. They're giving and taking feedback and becoming better artists and storytellers because of it. It's a really inspiring thing to see.

SP!: What originally drew you into publishing? When did reading comics no longer seem like enough and when did you realize that you wanted to make your own—with your own vision?

Derek: When Brian told me we could.

Brian: Well, I've been drawing comics since I was six years old, so making comics has been a constant in my life. I tend to blame the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles for starting me on my comics journey. Like most kids in the late 80s, I was obsessed with the Ninja Turtles. I watched the cartoon, had a ton of the toys, and even dressed up as one for Halloween. Then, one day, I found an issue of the Ninja Turtles in a store and my parents were kind enough to buy it for me. After that, I found some scrap paper, folded it in half, and started drawing.

I drew hundreds of comics throughout my youth and then, in 2001, I self-published my first comic, *Drunken Cat Presents*. For me, publishing was a fulfillment of a childhood dream. I still remember vividly the first time I saw a book I made on the new comics shelf in a comic store. That was an awesome day!

SP!: Let's dig deeper. What's your day job? What other hopes and ambitions do you follow?

Brian: I'm a web and graphic designer. My hope, like most comic

makers', is to one day have comics be my only job. I'd also like to own a monkey that can play the accordion.

Derek: Ugh. My day job is just an excuse to get health care and to sock away a little money, so that one day, I can pursue my true passion of paying someone to clone velociraptor so I may knife fight them while skydiving.

SP!: You have a decently large body of work. Tell us about the stuff you've put out, both on your own and with or for others, under the Drunken Cat name.

Derek: I always work with Brian and really only became part of this operation full time in the past two years, so this question is all him.

Brian: Oh my... Well... over the years, we've produced comics from just about every genre, everything from crime to humor, and from surreal to slice of life.

The first comic series Drunken Cat Comics produced was called *Drunken Cat Presents*. It was an anthology with various stories that ranged from fantasy and action adventure to humor. In the first issue, Derek and I created a story called "My Neighbor Satan," which was about Satan living in the suburbs. Over the years, Satan has popped up in more stories than I can remember off the top of my head—the most recent of which being in our anniversary comic, where he goes to his high school reunion and gets in a football showdown with God.

Then there's Plungerboy. He was the first ongoing series Drunken Cat Comics put out. *The Adventures of Plungerboy* was an all-ages, kooky superhero book that was based off a skit I used to perform when I worked as a camp counselor. It starred Plungerboy, a hero armed with an enchanted plunger, and a plethora of other strange heroes, like Mustard Lady (who had a hand made of mustard bottles), Lactose-Intolerant Man (who pummeled villains with a block of cheese), Lard Man (with the power to be fat), and Soda Straw (who fired straws at villains from straw cannons he wore on his wrists). And the villains were even more bizarre. The series lasted for about twelve issues and the characters have shown up in some random anthologies over the years. We're actually currently collecting all the Plungerboy stories in a book that will be out early next year.

After that, I started *Ruffians*, which is a crime comic starring a three-foot tall, blue bear hitman named Scar, who's trying to find the murderer of his best friend. *Ruffians* is still going strong; Issue #9 is about to come out. I love crime comics.

Beyond that, we've come out with a lot of short stories for various anthologies (*Oh, Comics!*, *IF-X*, *Out of the Blue*) and last year, we even came out with our first foreign language comic, *La Poubelle*. It's written completely in French (thanks to the powers of Google Translate) and can best be described as the weirdest book we've ever produced.

SP!: So that brings us to why we're here... What's the new work you're about to unleash? What are you up to today and where can people find it?

Derek: Amidst catching up on Daily Shots (a task I am constantly falling behind on), I am slowly working on our next foreign-language book. At the current rate of one page every few months, it should be out before we are all dead. We also have several collected works premiering next year, if you'd like to pay for a physical copy of something you can look at online for free.

Brian: We have lots of stuff in the works right now. I'm currently working on finishing the "Ruffians" story arc, so more issues of that will be coming out soon. It'll contain lots of blood, booze, and broads—you know things that make crime comics about cartoon bears fun!

For everyone that's a fan of memoir and/or journal comics, I just finished up the year-long adventure of creating a daily journal comic. I have to say, it's truly amazing what can happen over the course of a year. We're currently in the process of putting all 300-and-some journal comics in a book. And that should be out the beginning of next year.

Beyond that, as mentioned above, we'll be producing some graphic novel collections of our webcomics, "Daily Shots" and "Mixed Drink Wednesdays". We'll also be gathering up all of the old Plungerboy comics and short stories for a collection. I'm sure there'll be some other surprises as well. Best bet is to check out our website, DrunkenCatComics.com, for updates and new releases.

SP!: What else can you add? Is there anything we missed asking about? I know we ended up rushing this interview, but I want to make sure you get your say...

Brian: We put up free comics every day on our website. So check those out... or bad things will happen... and never trust a sober dog. http://drunkencatcomics.com/

Derek: If anyone can get me in touch with someone who is working on cloning velociraptors, that would be great.

Smooth Sailing Ahead for Captain Crown

French creative team set to bring their tale of piracy, mystery, and murder on the high seas to an English-speaking audience.

By Ellen Fleischer

A murdered pirate captain, five heirs, a great treasure, and a greater mystery... This is the premise of The Will of Captain Crown, the critically-acclaimed French comic by writer Tristan Roulot and artist Patrick Hénaff. The book has already been translated into German and received a warm reception in both Germany and the Netherlands. Now, Roulot and Hénaff have teamed up with Yann Brouillette to introduce their oeuvre to an English-speaking public.

So far, it looks like clear skies and smooth sailing. Their Kickstarter campaign hit its target in eight days and more than doubled it by the time the campaign closed on October 24th. Both writer and artist were happy to talk to SP! about their work, their plans, and their first venture into self publishing.

SP!: How did you two meet? How long have you been collaborating?

TR: I've lived in Paris for about twenty years, and came to Montreal five years ago. A week later, I found a comic book artist's. Here was this dark man with a scar and a Breton name (I'm from Brittany too, homeland of Lancelot and Merlin) and we soon decided to do something together: a true Pirate story, hard and salty.

PH: I've been living in Canada for fifteen years and after a few years in the west, I decided to move to Montreal. I had joined the studio where we met about a year before. I had a lot in common with Tristan and got along well. It wasn't long before we decided to work together.

SP!: Can you share a bit of your background with us? What brought you into comics? Is this something you always saw yourselves doing?

TR: No limit to my imagination, low budget, no cast to control, a limited team with the same spirit: as a writer, the comic is the perfect art form to suit my creative needs. I can't work alone; I must have a partner I trust and who is able to challenge me and to tell if I'm going in the right (or wrong sometimes!) direction.

PH: It's something I have always seen myself doing, even though there was a time when my life took a very different route. I didn't study Art but Law, and my first job had nothing to do with art whatsoever. My first gigs as a professional illustrator in Alberta were editorial cartoons and book illustrations. It was a lot of fun, but drawing comic books was always on my mind. I started to go to conventions, signed a first contract in Chicago, and moved east.

SP!: Who or what would you consider to have had the greatest influence(s) on your work? (I.E. fellow writers/artists, particular works, life experience, sage advice...)

TR: Hard to tell. Everything I read, see, or listen to influences my writing in a good or bad way. But there are some individuals that moved me tremendously when I was seventeen, like Tolkien, Otomo, Baudelaire, Michael Moorcock, E.A. Poe, Frank Herbert, Bret Easton Ellis, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle… Too

many to name, really ☺.

PH: I can't think of one specific artist who might have influenced my style, but there are rather a lot of little things here and there that inspire me in my work—many different artists with many different styles.

SP!: You were both born in France and now live in Canada. What prompted you to relocate to this side of the Atlantic?

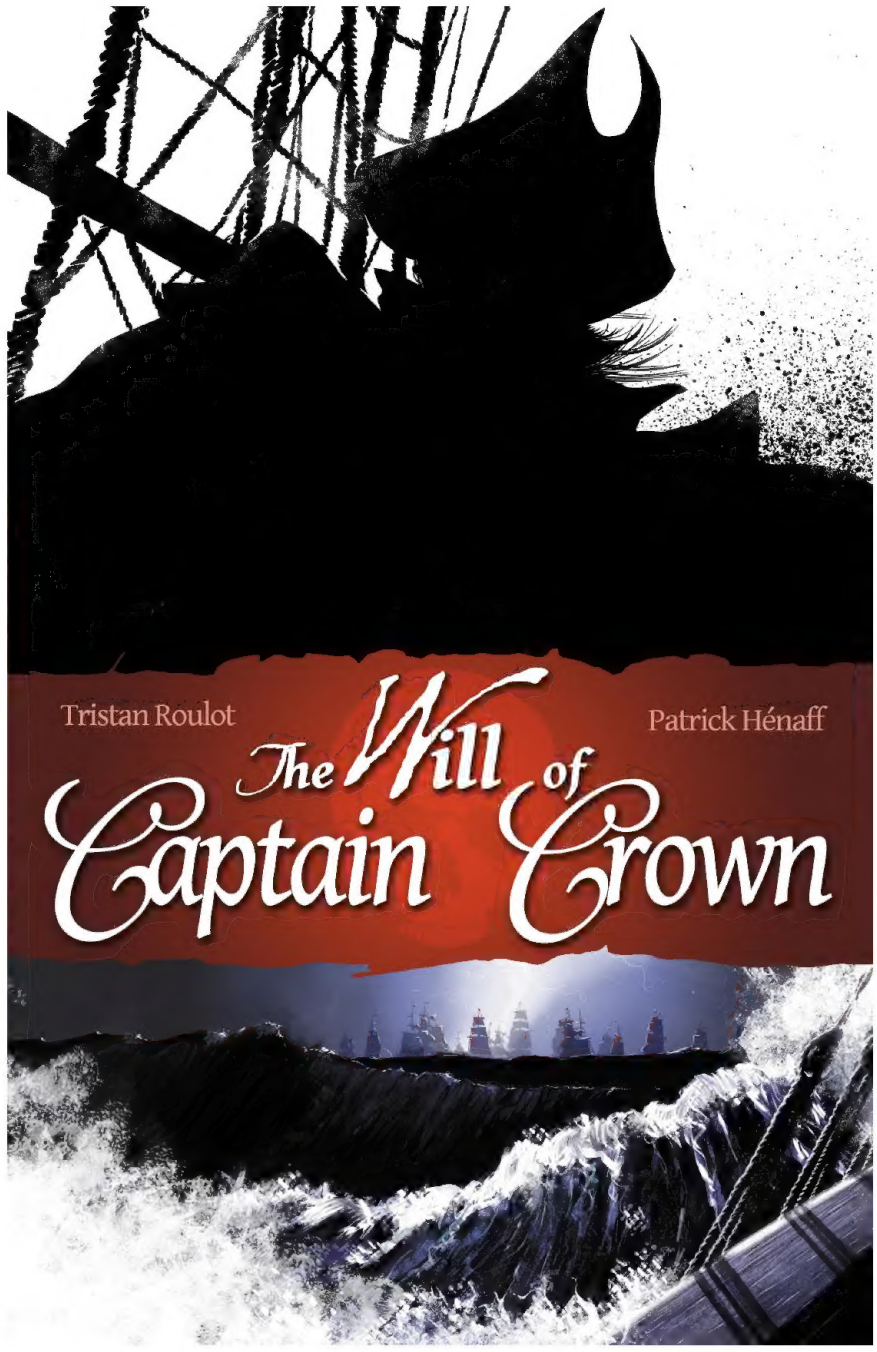
TR: The creative energy! Montreal is the perfect balance between the European and the American comic book. Some authors here work on both markets and it's very exciting to compare our experience. Each way has its pros and cons. I think the best is to mix it up together and just keep the good parts.

PH: I came to Montreal hoping to be at a crossroads of comic book culture. On one hand, the major American publishers, located just on the other side of the border, and on the other hand, the presence of a European graphic novel scene due to the French language. I wasn't disappointed; that is exactly what I found here.

SP!: Can you describe your creative process? How do you develop your ideas?

TR: I begin with the thing I want to tell, the feeling I want to give to the reader. It gives me a background. Then comes the plot, then the characters, and then subplots and others characters. At every step of the project, I have lots of discussions with the artist I work with, so the result will be as much mine as it is his.

PH: The looks of the characters and places are really dictated by the



story and the role each character plays in it. Knowing even vaguely where the story points allows you to create protagonists that are not going to look out of place or grotesque at any time (assuming you don't want them to). Comic book characters cannot work in every situation; they have a specific role to play and they must look the part. Like for actors, there is a casting process. The same goes for the locations: they are going to provide the book with a unique flavor. It's important to choose them well and it involves a lot of research and scouting.

SP!: And how about the collaborative process? How does that work?

TR: We have a discussion about each new scene. I write it panel by panel and dialogue after dialogue and then, we discuss it again. After Patrick has made a first draft, we talk about his creative choices. (We're French, we argue a lot!) Once the both of us agree on everything, then Patrick pencils and inks the scene. And then I rewrite the dialogue, if necessary, to really match the facial expression of the character speaking.

PH: There is a lot of input on both sides. We are both very much involved in every aspect of the book and it feels as though the result changes and evolves until the very end. It makes for a very lively and interesting process.

SP!: Tristan, I see your body of work covers a range of genres, including fantasy (Brögunn), humor (Goblins), youth (Mikido), war (Paroles de la guerre d'Algérie 1954-1962), action (PsykoParis), and adventure (The Will of Captain Crown). Do you have a preferred genre?

TR: I don't really, no. To give you an example, my next comic book series, also with Patrick, will be about the subprime crisis. I work on the writing with an ex-trader and current fund CEO to give me a real insight on this subject. Every genre has its own difficulties and challenges, and offers me another way to say the things that seem important to me.

SP!: Are there any themes or ideas that you would say keep coming up in your works, regardless of genre?

TR: I don't know for sure, but the struggle between morality and survival plays a great role in my writing. In Brögunn, mountain villagers welcome a platoon of exhausted soldiers for one night. Will the soldiers keep their word and leave in the morning, knowing that only death awaits them out in the wilderness? That's the kind of tragic story I like to tell. Most of my fun comes from the psychology of my characters. The Will of Captain Crown is a crime story à la Agatha Christie, set on a pirate ship. When the background is limited to a few places, the relationships between characters are more intense and tend to easily explode!

SP!: Patrick, I see you've also done Street Poker with Glenat. Can you tell us a bit about that?

PH: Right after arriving in Montreal, I left my portfolio at the recently opened Glenat offices in Quebec.

A few months later, they were looking for an illustrator for a story by Pierre Poirier about a poker champion who helps a woman with a gambling problem find her child after she has lost him, playing cards. They called me and that was my first European experience.

SP!: Currently, you're working on bringing The Will of Captain Crown to an English-speaking readership. Is there something about this property that made you think that this was the best project to start with over, say, Mikido?

TR: Mikido is quite a funny story. I worked with an animation studio at the time, and this book is based on the universe from the TV cartoon. It's the only book I wrote that is not really and absolutely my own creation.

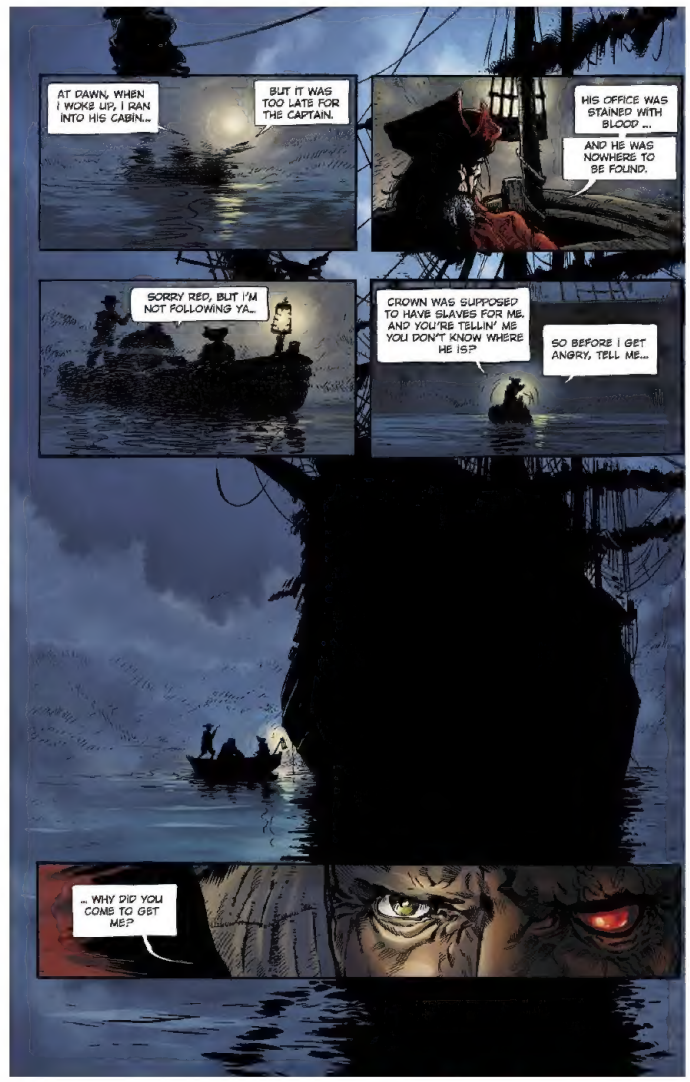
PH: The Will of Captain Crown has already been published in Germany and Holland. I was invited over there for a festival and realized that people in those countries were just as excited with the books as they were in France. It made us think that it was no reason why people wouldn't like it in English. There is no cultural barrier here: people love pirates all over the world.

SP!: I see that you're working with Yann Brouillette on the translation. Have there been any challenges that needed to be met or changes that needed to be made when adapting the dialogue?

TR: Translating is hard work. Really hard work. Especially with a series that has a real historical background. The dialogue must sound like seventeenth century Pirate English, yet remain dynamic and modern. Yann is a gifted comic book writer; he knows his stuff ;)

SP!: The Will of Captain Crown was published in French by Soleil, but as I understand it, you're releasing the English edition on your own. What prompted your decision to self publish?

PH: We figured that, with both of us living in Canada, we might be in better position to take care of the translation and promotion of the series here. Knowing that the readership for large and expensive European graphic novels was very limited in the U.S. and Canada, we believed it would be more relevant to not only translate, but also reformat all the pages and turn them into an American comic book. The American publishers we approached were a bit hesitant, so we decided to take the matter into our own hands and finance this project with a crowdfunding campaign through Kickstarter.


AT DAWN, WHEN I WOKE UP, I RAN INTO HIS CABIN...
BUT IT WAS TOO LATE FOR THE CAPTAIN.
HIS OFFICE WAS STAINED WITH BLOOD ...
AND HE WAS NOWHERE TO BE FOUND.
SORRY RED, BUT I'M NOT FOLLOWING YA...
CROWN WAS SUPPOSED TO HAVE SLAVES FOR ME. AND YOU'RE TELLIN' ME YOU DON'T KNOW WHERE HE IS?
SO BEFORE I GET ANGRY, TELL ME...
... WHY DID YOU COME TO GET ME?

SP!: Is there any advice you wish that someone had given you (or that you wish you had listened to!) about self-publishing when you started out?

TR: Two questions you must answer, if you're planning to have an audience: "Who are the people that will love my book?" and "How can I find them?"

PH: We pay attention to every piece of advice or suggestion that our future readers make and we learn a lot.

SP!: What do you do when you aren't working on comics?

TR: I play guitar in a band, play some soccer every Sunday, watch movies, and play video games. Like a 38-year-old teenager, I think…

PH: I still do storyboards every once in a while and I box at a very cool gym in Montreal.

SP!: Are there any other projects on your horizon, at the moment?

TR: More books, always more books!

PH: Books, self-publishing, web… It's an exciting time!

SP!: Is there anything else you'd like our readers to know that we haven't touched on yet?

TR: The Will of Captain Crown is our first attempt to connect with an English-speaking readership. We hope you'll like our book !

PH: Considering the interest and the positive feedback that we have already received, we are considering following the same path with our future series, so stay tuned.

SP!: Finally, where and how can folks find your work and keep up with you?

Both: You can "like" our Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/TheWillofCaptainCrown

Or check the updates on the Kickstarter page: http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1835178575/the-will-of-captain-crown-a-hardboiled-pirate-comi

SP!: Thanks so much!

Both: Thanks, Ellen !

PULLED INTO THE UNDERTOW

An Interview with Gibson Quarter and Luke Donkersloot

By Ellen Fleischer

This month, SP! catches up with writer Luke Donkersloot and artist Gibson Quarter to discuss life, creativity, a cat that won't stay off the drawing board, and their current collaboration: Undertow.

SP!: How did you two meet? How long have you been collaborating?

LD: The collaborators' forum on digitalwebbing.com. I was in my early 20s and trying to figure out the best format for the stories I wanted to tell. I decided it was time to try my hand at scripting and digitalwebbing was printing a book every few months full of guys like myself that were throwing in to cover printing costs. I put up a thread offering $20 per finished page and got a big response, including [one from] Gibson Quarter. He was the first (of only a few) to actually get me back a finished page and "The Organ-Grinder" was born. This was 11 years ago. We met face to face in New Orleans about a year and a half ago.

GQ: Twenty bucks per page? Geez that was a long time ago. ;-) While it's only been a few published issues, it feels like we have been collaborating forever. We are on the same wavelength when it comes to Undertow.

SP!: Can you share a bit of your background with us? What brought you into comics? Is this something you always saw yourselves doing?

LD : My parents moved four kids up to a remote town in western Alaska called Naknek when I was 11 years old. It was a journey by car, ferry, and finally, plane and I had a small stack of comics to keep me company on the way. Every chance I had to hit a store on the way up, that stack grew a little. Stack's been growing ever since. Winters are long in AK, so it turned out to be a good choice for a hobby and now I love it too much to ever think of letting go. I always knew that I'd enjoy seeing my stories in the comic format, but it wasn't until my 20s that I started thinking realistically about how to make it happen.

GQ: Uncanny X-men #115 brought me into comics. After that issue, I was hooked.

SP!: Who or what would you consider to have had the greatest influence(s) on your work? (I.E. fellow writers/artists, particular works, life experience, sage advice...)

LD: Clive Barker has been my favorite novelist since high school, writing those big, long books that you just don't want to end. That scope of story is the type that's always appealed to me most. I've read way too many X-Men comics, which weren't always that good, but it was that same element that kept me going. It's not just a story, but the living characters in the story. The world is full of people with interesting stories—I've known a few that were good orators as well; it was a pleasure just to take a few moments to listen, learn, and lose myself for a few in their story. It's happening around us all the time, right? We just need to pay attention. And if you're a guy like me, maybe you steal a thing or two, twist it up a little, and make it into your own. I've also learned a lot from GQ about both comics and stories—this guy is sharp!

GQ: Aww... thanks. You are making me blush! The greatest influences on my work are probably John Byrne and Terry Austin, Joe Mad, and Arthur Adams. The quote from Joe Mad to keep working on your

craft because "you are never quite as good as you think you are" has stayed with me—and is totally true!

SP!: Can you describe your creative process? How do you develop your ideas?

LD : I wish I had a better one, honestly. I end up spending way more time thinking about stories I've got going than I do sitting down and writing—situational stuff, trying to tune my head into one of my characters, figuring out how they'll react. I'm not good at mapping things out; I'll have some plot points and thematic things I know I want to hit along the way, but usually, when I start putting words on paper I get a few surprises because the characters decide their own part in the story. The challenge becomes keeping the reader with you through all this without getting too heavy with exposition. I still need a lot of improvement there.

GQ: I draw out what Luke writes and try and make it as clear as I can from a storytelling perspective, while making it look cool and charming at the same time. That's the plan, anyways.

SP!: And how about the collaborative process? How does that work?

LD: GQ, for some reason, trusts that I know what I'm doing, so to start, I do a full script with panel descriptions and all that. I hit all the elements (physical items, character motivations, etc.) that are going to be significant, but try not to bog him down too much. The captions and dialogue always get a rewrite, because inevitably, GQ is going to make some of it redundant with illustrations, or the text will need slight changes to help keep the tone just so; keep the pacing under control so the panels hit hard right when we want them to. He changes some things around when he needs to to keep the point of view moving smoothly, or when he thinks his idea is way better. Any major changes we'll discuss, but that's pretty rare. We're on the same wavelength. I usually sit down to write him an email, and then one from him shows up in my inbox before I can hit SEND (mine are a little lengthier). Now that I think about it, he didn't show me the panel layouts for Undertow #3…

GQ: What he said. And I will show Luke the layouts from now on! ;-)

SP!: Gibson, you've also worked on War on Drugs, I see. What can you tell us about that?

GQ: "War on Drugs" (written by Alan Grant) was pretty much my first gig and harkens back to the days of a magazine called Northern Lightz in Scotland. Grant wrote a Judge Dredd-type DEA agent character called Johnny K for a strip called the "War on Drugs." I loved working on these scripts and the strip ran for a few years, eventually landing in Wasted magazine. This was the first time I had other inkers working on my pencil art and it was a great experience. I'm very proud of some of those strips and they went over quite well in the UK, I'm told. There are now some rumblings about bringing W.O.D. to a publisher over here in North America, so we may see Johnny K again one day.

SP!: How about Holmes, Inc?

GQ: Holmes Inc. is a nifty little project by Ty Templeton. Students who take Ty's educational Bootcamp comics class are then tasked with creating a comic using the Holmes Inc. characters and universe. All the while, they are working with a professional comics editor (Ty) and learning a ton about the craft of creating comics. I have art in two Holmes Inc. issues. While working with Ty, I picked up a few sweet bits of comic knowledge that I've been able to incorporate into my Undertow pages.

SP!: So… moving on to Undertow. Luke, your blogspot (http://7thwavecomics.blogspot.ca/) mentions that you started it in 2003, but that the first issue was launched in 2011? Can you clarify?

LD: There were originally two writers for Undertow, the other being my childhood friend Derek Webster. I spend half my year working in Alaska and Derek was realizing how much of the work was going to fall on him to drive this thing and do it well, plus he had his first child on the way. I ended up going back to Alaska without Undertow #1 reaching completion and Derek became a father (of four, now). Work pretty much took over my life for some years after that. It really bothered me that I never finished the book, though. Six years later and now in my thirties, I made it to my first comic con (Emerald City in Seattle). When I got home, I knew what I had to do. I contacted the artists that had originally worked with me on the book and found that GQ and our friend Greg Harms (who does the color and graphic design for the book, among other things) were still into comics, and down to finally finish the book.

GQ: And the rest is history!

SP!: Have you worked on other projects as well?

LD: Nothing that's been printed.

GQ: I've drawn pages for numerous magazines and comics: Futurequake, Wasted, Holmes Inc., and, most recently, Heroes of the North and Undertow.

SP!: What genre(s) of stories will your readers find in Undertow? Can you give a short synopsis of a few (or all!)?

LD: Most of the stories I write have either a sci-fi/fantasy or supernatural/horror bend. The two ongoing stories that I'm working on for Undertow right now are "The Forgetting," which is about a man who seems immortal and has trouble coming to grips with it. He's able to erase his memories (though not permanently) and continually creates new identities for himself. The story begins in Undertow #2, when this process is interrupted and the Forgetter is caught helpless by a being from his past. As the story unfolds, he'll be reunited with several others from his past for the first time in thousands of years and they'll have to decide the roles they'll play in mankind's future and discover something of the parts they've played in our past. The second is "The Organ-Grinder," the lovechild of GQ and myself from back in the day. It's the story of a one-armed vagrant named Jeremiah who travels with a monkey named Moses. Jeremiah is in possession of an organ (street organ) that seems to be connected with a young girl from Jeremiah's past. The young girl appears to him when he plays the organ and shows him the path he is to take, always leading him into violence, death, and vengeance. Jeremiah follows the course and has somehow lived through a lot of bad situations, hoping that at the end of it all there will be some kind of redemption, but at this point in the story, he's still unsure if the girl is truly connected with the organ, or if it's using her appearance to manipulate him.

SP!: Did you ever try to get Undertow picked up by one of the mainstream publishers, or did you always have in mind to self-publish? What prompted your decision?

LD: I haven't approached anyone with the book. I don't think that Undertow in its current format (or, at least, at the rate we're putting out new issues) is very appealing to a larger publisher that's actually trying to make money. From the beginning, I've known that if I was going to do this we were going to be on our own for a while. After deciding that I was going to follow through and actually make my own comic, I thought how futile it would be to just do the one issue, so I promised myself I would see at least ten issues of Undertow. At the rate we've been going (one per year), that's still going to be a while, but I see that rate of production picking up in the next year or two for a couple of different reasons.

GQ: Yep, I see getting a collected edition out when we have a critical mass of pages and the story is at a decent closure point, before hitting a second story arc. Once that happens and the decks are cleared for a more rapid publishing pace, we'll shop it around to Dark Horse, Arcana, Boom Studios, etc. The market is becoming more and more kind to good indie books (ie: Chew), so we hope to benefit from that after we are a proven commodity.

SP!: Is there any advice you wish that someone had given you (or that you wish you had listened to!) about self-publishing when you started out?

LD:Talk to people. I've read a lot about self-publishing, but this is way more important. Find someone who knows more than you and ask as many questions as you can. The comics community is the best creative community in the world. People might not want to work with you specifically, because this whole process takes a lot of time, especially for an artist, but all these creators love what they're doing, especially at the self-publishing/breaking-in level, and they will want to share what they know with you. Comic cons are a great place to find a lot of these people in one place—take advantage of it while spending your money (and please, spend your money!). Self-publishing is not going to be cheap on any level and when you find reliable guys that will work on your no-name stuff—pay them! It's a small community and word gets around, so don't pretend to be a big-shot. Anyone who knows anything will recognize your inexperience very quickly. There are guys out there working a lot longer and harder than you are to make a life at this.

GQ: I've written about this on my blog at length, but two quotes have really stuck with me: Seth Fisher said, "Just draw to feel good and always raise the bar for yourself on every picture you draw. In this way you will always move forward. The bottom line for you that distinguishes between really good pages and the mediocre is just the amount of time that you put into the page. A good page takes a long time to make and is often redrawn several times to

make it work. This is a secret part of the process, of course. People assume it comes out right the first try." The second bit of advice is from Bernard Cornwell. It's about writing, but applies to artists as well. "In the end, you have to write the book. Do it, and remember that everyone began just like you, sitting at a table and secretly doubting that they would ever finish the task. But keep at it. A page a day and you've written a book in a year! And enjoy it! Writing, as many of us have discovered, is much better than working."

LD: Amen. Sitting down is hard.

SP!: What do you do when you aren't working on comics?

LD: I load freight barges in Western Alaska and coordinate vessel traffic in Bristol Bay, home to the largest sockeye salmon run in the world. We deliver freight to all kinds of places you will never hear of. And when the rivers and Bering Sea freeze up, it's time for me to go home and do another issue of Undertow.

GQ: Sleep!

SP!: Where do you see Undertow in five years?

LD: In five years, I suspect we'll have reached my ten-issue goal and have collected editions out for some of the stories in the book. If the book continues on as Undertow, at that point, I anticipate that some of the longer-running stories will be put into their own books. I'm planning on working some more stories and illustrators into Undertow very soon to pick up the pace of production (and get me writing some more!) And GQ sells "The Organ-Grinder" to HBO.

GQ: I'm totally selling this to HBO or Showtime. Then Luke and I can drink better, more expensive whiskey and "The Organ-Grinder" story gets the respect and exposure it deserves.

LD: That is a great idea. I hadn't even thought about the whiskey.

SP!: Are there any other projects on your horizon, at the moment?

LD: A new website is in the works for this winter. That, along with writing more, finishing Undertow #4, and finding some new talent to add new stories to the book is definitely going to keep me busy. And reading comics! I can never keep up on all this cool new stuff coming out, plus all that I miss while I'm in AK.

GQ: I have more Heroes of the North pages coming out soon and Undertow #4 production is just underway.

LD: Undertow #4 will be released at the Emerald City Comicon (Seattle, WA, March 28–30). This show is blowing up; you should definitely go—there is so much cool stuff going on. Get tickets early, though, I'm sure it will sell out again.

SP!: Gibson, just how do you get the cat off the drawing board?

GQ: If I told you, I'd have to kill you. Let's just say it isn't pretty.

LD: Cruelty to animals (the tasteful kind) has actually become something of a theme in our book. Unintentionally, of course. Gibson considers it research, mostly.

SP!: Is there anything else you'd like our readers to know, that we haven't touched on yet?

WHAT?!
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
WHERE'S JACK AND THE BOYS?
DEAD, PROBABLY.
SURE WAS HEADED THAT WAY WHEN I LEFT.
YOU LEFT?!
SHOOT YES I DID. FEEL LUCKY AS I DID GETTIN' OUT OF THERE.
THAT MAN AIN'T RIGHT. ALMOST LIKE THERE'S SOMETHING PROTECTING HIM.
AND I--- I MISSED, HANK.
I MISSED HIM, AND HE MAY AS WELL HAVE JUST BEEN STANDING THERE.
DO YOU KNOW HOW LONG IT'S BEEN SINCE I MISSED? DO YA?
BUT THERE WAS SOMETHING ELSE, MOVING THROUGH THE BRUSH AND SHADOWS, THROUGH THE MEN.
DESTROYING THEM.
WOMAN, YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT THE HECK YOU'RE SAYIN'.

L D: If you have not read or bought Undertow and think it might interest yo-, give us a chance! Undertow is getting better all the tim-. I'm told #3 was awesome and #4 is going to be even bette . We are committed to making something that is worth your mone . You have my deepest, heartfelt promise that we will not sell you shi . GQ promises, too.

GQ: I pinkie-swear!

SP!: Finally, where and how can folks find your work and keep up with you?

LD: Undertow #s #–3 are available from the Paypal store on my blog at www.7thwavecomics.com, and I do a slightly better job of posting on the Undertow Facebook page to keep people up on current projects for GQ, Greg Harms, and Adam Gorham (artist for "The Forgetting". Undertow #1 has recently become available on Comixology for 99 cents, and features the beginning of "The Organ-Grinder."

I can be reached via email at undertow@7thwavecomics.com and am open to any questions and especially feedback about Undertow!

GQ: For any and all art-related projects, my blog is the best bet: http://gibsonquarter-27art.blogspot.ca/. For general ramblings and assorted funny pictures, my twitter: @gibsonquarter, or Facebook page are good places to find me.

James Lyle

By Louise Cochran-Mason

James E. Lyle has been working as an artist for 30 years. He has done numerous comic books, advertising artworks, album covers, book and magazine illustrations, and licensed designs. Over the years he has done work-for-hire, creator owned, and commissioned works.

This year, as well as having a 30-year retrospective, he and long time collaborator Mike Leonard are currently relaunching their DoorMan comic book series and trying their hand at self publishing.

James tells us SP! more.

SP!: How did the retrospective come about? Did you set it up or did the arts center approach you?

JL: This is one of those things where the term 'networking' gets thrown around a lot. How it came about is that I was invited to the local water media society group by a good friend. I don't normally attend this group, but as they were having a former Disney artist, I thought it would be a good idea. While I was there, I ran into a former art instructor, Jenny Johnson, who is administrator of the Swain County Centre for the Arts.

She first asked me if I'd be willing to come out to do a presentation of the "Brainstorming a Superhero" talk that I've done at numerous schools and libraries, and when that turned out to be a success (defined as getting a dozen people when, normally, they'd get five), she asked if I would like to do a proper show of my work.

A good portion of this year has been spent working on preparing artwork for this event. I stepped out of my comfort zone and created a large painting as the centerpiece for the show.

I am in charge of much of the details, but Jenny has been very helpful in giving guidance on what to do and how to accomplish it as inexpensively as possible—because the cost of getting all the pieces catalogued and ready to hang can be a daunting task.

Getting the band, Gypsy Bandwagon, to play for the reception was fairly easy—since it's a band my wife and I are part of. As a band, we've been looking for more gigs like this one (mid-afternoon, not in a bar), and since half the band was going to be there anyway, it didn't take too much convincing the others.

Still working on how to set up refreshments for the reception, but that will likely be little more than cookies, mixed nuts, and punch. Still, depending on how many people show up, we have to be prepared.

SP!: You're re-releasing DoorMan (which you created with Michael Allan Leonard). What is it about?

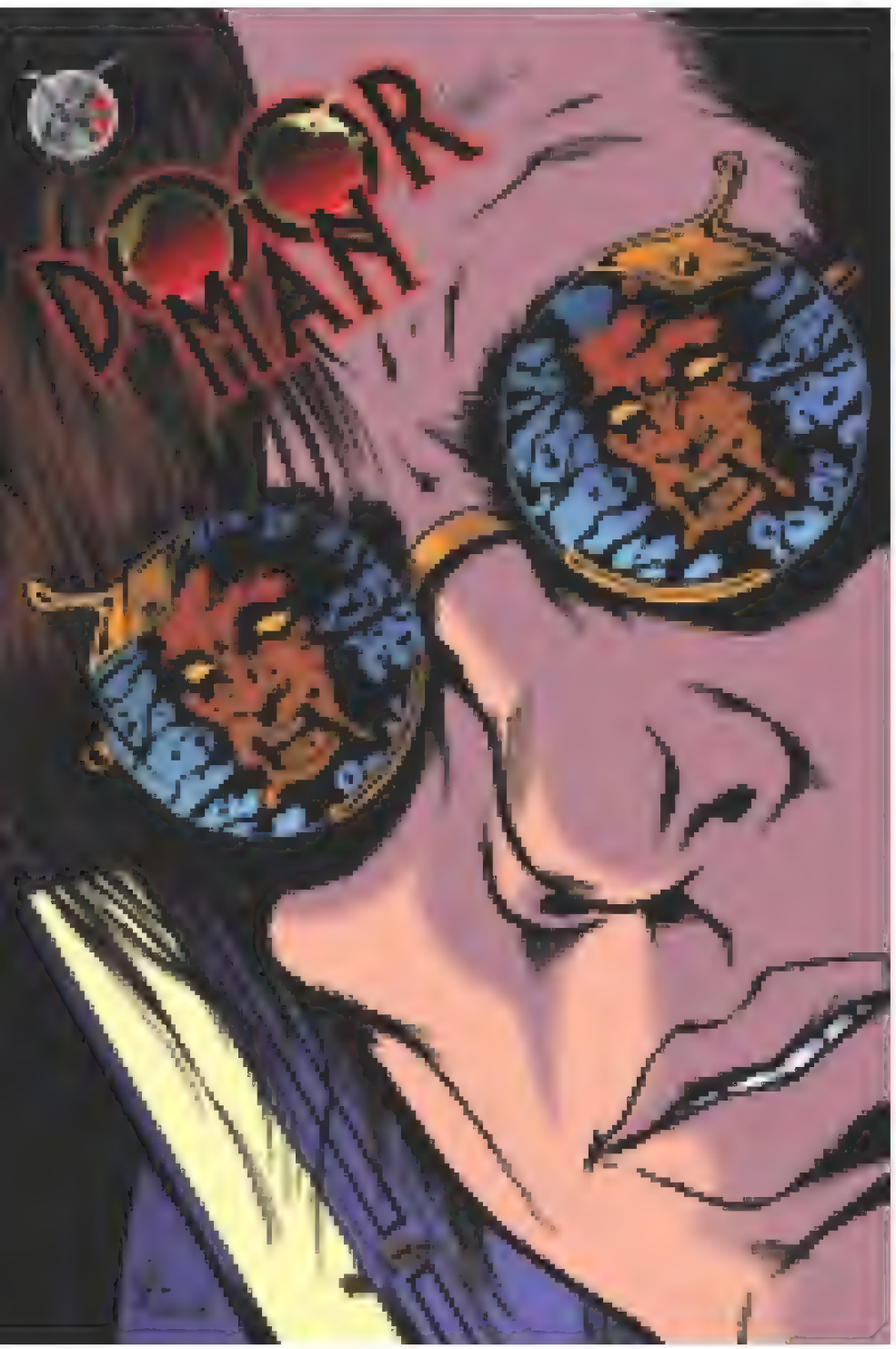
JL: DoorMan is about a character named Janus DeNile, who has been described as a "time-traveling Ghost of Christmas Past, mixed with a psychologist." The series was originally created by Mike back in the early 90s, and a lot of development went on between him and our publisher, Robert Graff, before I ever got involved. But Mike and I really tried to make it our own and ultimately, we have held onto the rights to the character through thick and thin.

The essence of the adventure is that DoorMan hunts "secret creatures" (or Arcanum). These creatures are created whenever a person keeps a secret. The bigger the secret, the more dangerous the Arcanum. The only way to kill one is for the host to confess the secret they hold. Janus's usual M.O. is to take the host back in time and show him the circumstances

surrounding the event, thereby exposing the truth. Sometimes, this works, other times... not so much.

SP!: You had problems with publishers when DoorMan was originally released?

JL: Uh, yeah. Well, the short version of this is that Cult Press had great intentions and then overextended by printing the first issue of DM in color on slick stock. That was about the time of the first UPS strike, and when the dust had settled, the shipping costs just about killed Cult Press.



Within a couple of years, we moved along to Caliber Comics and while we had a good run with our four issue miniseries and one short story in Negative Burn, we really didn't know what to do with the exposure while we had it.

There were several similarly-themed series running at Caliber at that time: Saint Germaine (written by publisher Gary Reed), Kilroy (written by Joe Pruett, editor of Negative Burn) and The Apparition (by his brother Jim Pruett, Caliber's managing editor)–while we were even considering doing some crossover work, ultimately they decided that it was best to let DoorMan go and concentrate on the other titles, which were stronger sellers (which is one reason I ended up drawing a couple of Saint Germaine stories for Gary later on).

That's where the "other" publisher came in (it will remain nameless to protect the innocent). Mike and I were under the impression that we'd both be moving from where we were (he from PA, and me from the mountains to more central NC) to begin work on a new company. He would have been managing editor, and I was to be art director. Unfortunately, the company simply didn't have the backing needed to make this happen and after that disappointment, he and I drifted apart for a while. No animosity drove that, just depression over what we'd hoped to achieve being dashed and life itself.

More recently, after reconnecting, we were in discussions with another publisher (that will also remain nameless). But the discussion didn't go too far, before we realized the terms they initially had to offer simply weren't worth the effort we had already put into DoorMan. It might be 20 years old, but we still think it's got some life in it. More than the percentage we were being offered to turn something over that we've held the rights to thus far.

SP!: Will you be self-publishing all your creator-owned comics from now on?

JL: I don't think we're burning any bridges at this point. We're definitely looking at all possible venues for releasing our creator-owned comics. With so many potential means of distributing our work together, Mike and I have been discussing just about every variation, be it web, ebook, short run, print-on-demand, what have you. But if a serious offer comes along by a larger publisher, we'll consider it.

SP!: Is it being released exclusively on Smack Jeeves? Or will there be a print version?

JL: Actually, we have DoorMan mirrored on a number of web-comic sites at this point. Our intention is to eventually release the complete run of DoorMan: Family Secrets as a trade paperback with lots of additional material.

SP!: What other projects will you be releasing?

JL: We're discussing a lot of ideas at this point. Nothing concrete has been decided yet, but together, we're likely to be releasing a series of illustrated ebooks, prints, posters, T-shirts, and other projects that should appeal to the fan audience we've been rebuilding since DoorMan went online.

SP!: What appearances do you have lined up?

JL: Right now, it's mostly concentrating on the retrospective event, but in my duties as chairman of the Southeast Chapter of the National Cartoonists Society, I'm in charge of the upcoming annual meeting of that group in Knoxville, TN. That will be October 25–27 at the Crowne Plaza, Knoxville (most of the public portions of the programming will take place on October 26).

However, as part of promoting that event, I've been asked to appear on WBIR TV's "Live at Five at Four" on October 24, then WWST (Star 102.1) on the "Marc and Kim

Show," during the morning drive on October 25. Later that day, members of the group will be making a visit to the East Tennessee Children's Hospital to do sketches for some of the patients there.

Once the dust settles, from both the retrospective (which runs through mid-November) and the SECNCS annual meeting, I'm supposed to be appearing at Yama-Con Phase 2 in Pigeon Forge, TN. That one is the weekend of December 6–8, 2013. There's also talk of a few shop signings when the new material from Zenescope begins to appear.

SP!: Apart from comics, you illustrate a wide range of books and other products. Do you think it's important for an artist to be able to work on very different projects, and to set briefs, to make a living?

JL: Thus far, that does appear to be the way it works. Most every comics pro I've met in my life has also been a commercial artist. Commercial jobs generally pay better than comics. It's not always so, but even Charles Schulz did a lot of side jobs well into the run of Peanuts. And even after Peanuts became huge, Schulz Associates was busy licensing his work to various clients; actually, it still is.

It would be nice to be so recognized for my particular style or creations that I would have clients clamoring just to license what I've already done. And, maybe someday, that will happen. In the meantime, if I get offers for commercial jobs, I usually give them preference over comics (in terms of scheduling)—simply because they tend to pay six to ten times as much.

Comics, on the other hand, are much more fun to draw and people tend to remember your name when the project is finished.

SP!: Do you have an agent, do you source your jobs, or do you get headhunted?

JL: I do not have an agent, per se, at this point. I have had a number of good associations with various ad agencies, art directors, publishers, and editors, who do their best to send me work when they can. But, with the publishing industry in turmoil right now, nobody's job seems to be safe.

I have worked with ZaPow! Gallery in Asheville, NC in promoting my work, and can speak well of Lauren and Matt Johnson, who run that business. But they aren't an agency, per se. Just a resource for artists, as well as being artists themselves. I'm presently part of several company's "artists pools"—that is, if they find clients looking for work like mine, they'll contact me and set up things for a percentage but, thus far, not a lot of action has happened in that area.

SP!: You're chairman of the SouthEast Chapter of the National Cartoonists Society. What does that entail?

JL: Being Chairman of the SECNCS mainly seems to mean I spend hours a day doing emails. But that's just me being cynical.

I got involved with the SECNCS about ten years ago, when I was invited to attend an annual meeting of the group held in Asheville. It was a huge honor since I'd been wanting to be part of the NCS since I was 14.

The SECNCS is a regional chapter of the larger National Cartoonists Society and the membership requirements are quite different. In fact, officially, folks who associate with the chapter are called "non-members". They pay dues of $25 per year and can't hold office or vote for officers, but we do our best to make sure they're represented anyway.

The hope is that folks who associate with the chapter will eventually move up to full NCS status. That's

James Lyle Works

Comic Book and Graphic Novel Art

- 1000 Ways to Die
- Grimm Fairy Tales
- Game of Horror
- Tales From Neverland
- Turok
- Fright Night
- T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents
- Negative Burn
- Saint Germaine
- Adam Among the Gods
- Cynicalman
- The PLUS
- Drastik!
- DoorMan
- Escape to the Stars
- The Risen and the Dead

Album Art

- Todd Rundgren
- Slough Feg
- Shaun Friedman
- Anne Lough
- Gypsy Bandwagon

Licensed Designs

- Chance Fortune
- The Toxic Avenger
- Seattle Seahawks
- Peanuts Characters
- Batman Characters
- Dick Tracy Motion Picture
- Gumby & Pokey
- Coronaville
- Ron Jon Surf Shop
- Carribean Soul/Margaritaville
- Tommy Bahama

Licensed Designs

- Chance Fortune
- The Toxic Avenger
- Seattle Seahawks
- Peanuts Characters
- Batman Characters
- Dick Tracy Motion Picture
- Gumby & Pokey
- Coronaville
- Ron Jon Surf Shop
- Carribean Soul/Margaritaville
- Tommy Bahama

Clients

- Ambassador International
- SPIKE
- Zenescope Entertainment
- Dancap Productions
- Jones Soda Co.
- SuperBig Creative
- Weekly Reader
- JC Penny
- Ron Jon Surf Shop
- Margaritaville
- Corona
- Acclaim Entertainment
- SRI Apparel
- W.P. Hickman Co.
- Akarma / Comet Records
- Cruz Del Sur Music
- Alliance Publishing and Marketing
- Creative Images

what happened to me.

Along the way, I was put in charge of hosting the Asheville, NC monthly group meetings—which is one of my great joys. We have a lot of truly talented artists and fans that meet for pizza every first Tuesday.

Anyway, that job as Asheville organizer eventually got me elected vice-chair, where I served two terms under Jack Pittman's leadership. Now I'm in my first year as chairman.

My job is to oversee the network of cartoonists (and similarly-affected folks) from around the states of Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee.

How to go about this is anyone's guess. But a big part of it is putting on that yearly meeting. We get various volunteers from our group coming out to explain techniques and we usually manage to get at least one really big name to speak. This year, we've got several: Mike Lynch (with more magazine credits than just about anyone. He is actually the NCS national representative and he's coming from New England), Bill Holbrook (Safe Havens, The Fastrack, Kevin & Kell), Greg Cravens (The Buckets, HUBRIS), and John Lotshaw (Accidental Centaurs), who are going to be explaining to all of us how to transition from the old-school delivery of cartoon projects via print to all these new wonderful worlds of opportunity in digital creation and delivery. We're calling it "Teaching Old Dogs New Tricks".

Besides that, I'm the guy who is supposed to represent the group at the annual Reuben Awards. I didn't make it this past year, as I couldn't afford to go to both Pittsburgh (where they were held) and San Diego Comic-Con (where I went looking for work). But, I guess I'll have to go next year—as the Reubens is in San Diego!

SP!: You're on the Advertising and Graphic Design Advisory Committee of Southwestern Community College. What does that entail?

JL: Southwestern is my alma mater. Jenny Johnson was twice one of my instructors there, as I took over ten years to complete the Associates Degree program at that school. During that time, it rose in the ranks to become one of the top four community colleges in the nation. So, I have some pride in helping make that possible.

Primarily, it means about twice a year I go out to SCC and 1) talk to a class of students in the graphics program (it used to be called "commercial art") and 2) go to the graduating class portfolio review and critique their work.

If I come up with some brilliant idea mid-year, I'll contact the program head (Bob Keeling, also a graduate of SCC) and pass it along to him.

SP!: How did you get started in comics?

JL: It's my Uncle Rube's fault. When I was four, he brought my big brother some comics for a birthday party and I was hooked for life.

But as to how I managed to get started in actually drawing them... I was looking around for jobs from the time I was in my early teens. Sent samples to DC when I was 12. In the early 80s, I saw a classified ad in an issue of Comic Scene Magazine and ended up getting my first "pro" gig working with Phil Hwang.

Phil is now a producer/director out in Hollywood; at that time he was in high-school in Memphis, TN. We did several issues of Escape to the Stars together, and then parted ways. I went on to draw T.H.U.N.D.E.R. for Solson Publications and Phil went on to do "Hey Boss!" and get featured on MTV.

Since then, it's been a matter of schlepping work around and trying to get hired wherever I can. I've worked for NOW, Eclipse, Acclaim/Valiant, KASO, Cult, Caliber, M.A.I.N., Desperado, Aazurn, Comics Conspiracy, Quest, and most recently, Zenescope Entertainment.

And I've also been treated rotten by a number of companies. Not all of them, but a lot. The horror stories outweigh the happy stories: late paychecks, no paychecks, bad terms, unfair contracts, not credited, art not returned, art returned stamped with "this artwork is copyright by this company" (when I never agreed to such terms); you never know what to expect.

SP!: What advice would you give someone who wanted to become an artist?

JL: First off, you'd better love drawing a lot. Because you're going to do a lot of it— much of which will never be seen by anyone. I've got file drawers filled with unused material; some more complete, some less. But it is a lot of work and a fairly solitary life.

So, my second bit of advice is to find others like yourself that you can share the struggles with. The cartoonist meetings we have are more than just having a slice of pizza; sometimes they're like going to a shrink!

Third piece of advice: network. Besides being a release valve for your frustrations, meeting with others can also be a huge boon to your career. You'll get good advice on narrowing your focus and you'll get tips on where you can sell your work as well.

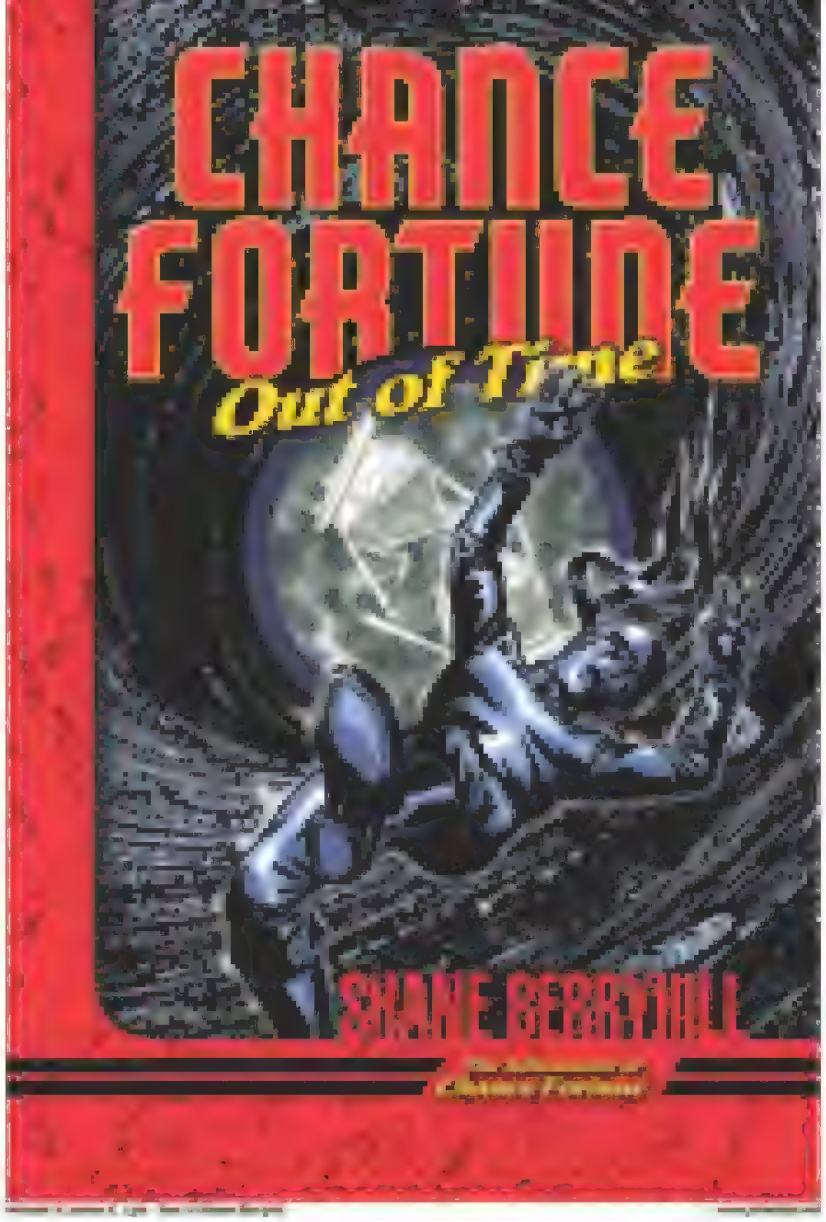
You will also do well to set up a standard contract to offer to clients. You can get a "boiler-plate" contract of this sort by consulting the Graphic Artists Guild Handbook: Pricing & Ethical Guidelines. You'll find that, very often, a lot of hassle goes out of the process simply by offering a potential client a contract when you begin negotiations. Include "progressive payments" in the contract—that is, so you get paid an advance and then as you complete each outlined task.

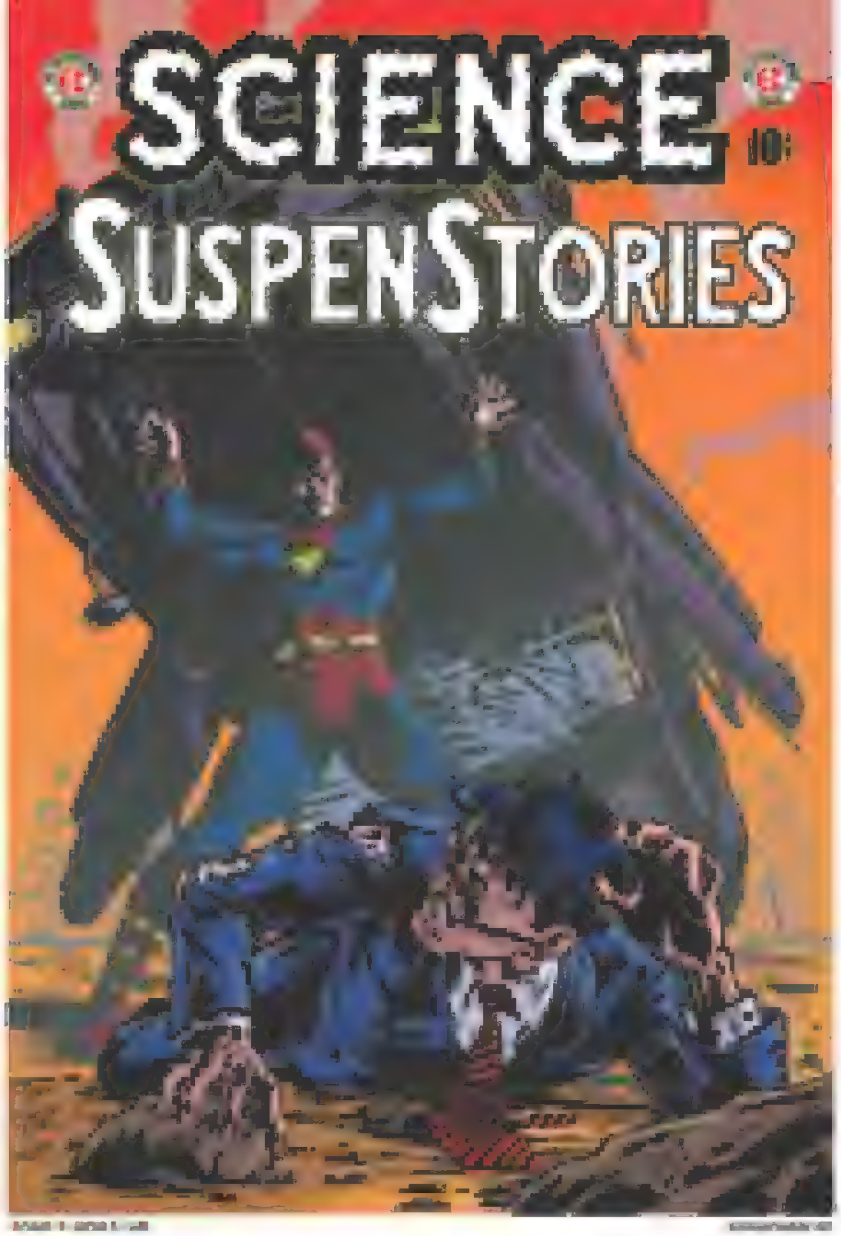
You will not always convince clients to pay that way, but it does give you a bargaining tool to say to your client, "This is the way things are normally done; now, let's discuss options".

(I had one client who rejected nearly every portion of the standard contract I offered them, but every time they came back with a change they offered me another hundred or so dollars. By the time we were finished, I had spent more time negotiating the contract than actually drawing—but it was one of the best paying jobs ever!)

SP!: Do you think the internet has made it easier for people to self publish and distribute their self-published work?

JL: I think it has opened a lot of doors, but with so many people





trying to get through the same doors—it becomes something like a Three Stooges shtick. But your next question kind of sums up the downside of the internet as a means of distributing work.

SP!: Do you think the number of self-published comics, print-on-demand comics, digital comics and webcomics makes it more difficult for individual creators to promote and market their work?

JL: Just attempting to be heard above the hubbub of all the people trying to make it in comics right now is extremely difficult.

One of the things that surprised me upon visiting San Diego Comic Con this summer, was just how few truly qualified people there really are trying to get work in comics. I don't mean this as a put-down, but there were many people showing up who were not as properly trained in telling a story or illustrating as the clients needed them to be. So, hours were spent trying to shuffle through those with stars in their eyes to get to those who could do the work necessary for the client.

On the other hand, everyone who wants to work in comics has to go through the process of showing work—as much as possible. You have to keep presenting your work to potential customers in order to get work. No matter what your level, you have to do it. And so I encourage all potential comics artists to show your work to as many people as you can, as often as you can. I know it's a drag at times. I've had my book trashed by more editors and publishers than I care to recall, but it's part of the process of getting work.

SP!: How does self publishing compare with work-for-hire?

JL: To my thinking, "self-publishing" is either a necessary evil or a terrible misnomer. Please don't think I'm putting self-publishing down by saying that, but in reality I don't think much distinction exists between the self-publisher and the "big time publisher".

If you think about it, DC Entertainment developed from Major Nicholson's desire to publish his own books. The same story goes with Max Gaines and All-American / EC. Nearly every comic book published by Marvel in the 1960s was written by Stan Lee while he was running the company. DC was headed by Paul Levitz for a number of years, yet he continued to write stories during that time, and presently, DC is run by Jim Lee, whose own work is published by that company constantly. So, the distinction is one of volume, not of involvement.

That being said, I've worked in nearly every permutation of publishing that exists. When I started out, I was accused of being a "vanity press" by members of my own family (in spite of the fact that Phil Hwang was paying me a page rate, even then). So, Phil was actually the publisher for the first two issues of ETTS. I only picked up the role when he ran short of money and I had some of my own.

I've worked for companies that have been smaller than they appeared and larger than they appeared. However, nobody does this stuff on their own. There is (so far as I know) no person who has ever singularly engaged in self-publishing, taking on all the roles for himself with no outside help. He

may not pay all the other people involved, but they're involved in some way with making a project happen.

Here's the big secret in publishing: every publisher, no matter how large they may appear to be, may be operating on a razor-thin margin.

Even so-called "legitimate" publishers operate this way. This is why Weekly Reader (for which I did several commercial jobs) went bankrupt, was sold to Reader's Digest, and as a division of that company, was shut down completely in the past year.

My point being, there is not one company involved in publishing that is not intertwined with the ego (or egos) of one or more people working there. People throw their lives into every facet of the publishing business and sometimes they come out fine, other times they fall flat on their faces. The ones that keep working when things don't go right are the ones that are successful.

In a perfect world, I'd like to be handed a check as soon as the job is completed. Work-for-hire offers this promise but, more often than not, fails to meet that goal. It carries with it a lot more restrictions on what one can do with work that is created.

Self-publishing, on the other hand, offers a lot more work with, supposedly, no restrictions. But it's much more than simply creating a product and getting it into a form that readers can consume (be it print, digital, or whatever). Self-publishing is also self-promotion, finance, advertising, networking, accounting, legal knowledge, and a host of other minor details (being the office plumber, for example).

SP!: Did you learn a lot about marketing and promotion from the various companies you worked with?

JL: At this point, I may have learned more about how NOT to do marketing and promotion than how to do it. I will offer this: no matter if you're working for yourself or some other publishing entity, it's important to be self-promoting anyway. You can't rely on the publicity created by your latest work to carry you to the next project all by itself. Use the most recent publication as a springboard to future projects.

SP!: Are you working on your own and other's materials concurrently?

JL: Yes. My own business plan (if I can use such a term for the amorphous entity that exists mainly in my head) involves getting as much work as I can handle and then, hopefully, fulfilling the obligations needed to complete all the assignments.

So, I am constantly working on various projects. In comics in particular, things don't move at a fast pace most of the time. Something I discussed with someone ten years ago may suddenly become viable, and then has to be completed in a matter of days. But that rush to complete mostly ignores the ten years of waiting prior to the rush of final creativity.

Specifically, I just finished 11 pages of pencils for Grimm Fairy Tales: Hunters #5 for Zenescope. That completed the story arc for that project. Immediately afterward, I went to work on a series of nine illustrations for Queen of Escapes from Airship 27 Productions. In the middle of all that, I have been doing cleanup and minor changes on all the DoorMan work we've posted so far and I've got some new material to create for DoorMan—hopefully sometime today. Mike Leonard and I began discussing a new short story to collaborate on for All-Star Pulp Comics late last week, and when I check my e-mail, I am anticipating a first draft of that script.

If that weren't enough, there are invitations to the 30-Year Retrospective to mail out and completion of plans for the SECNCS annual meeting to finish.

SP!: Is there anything you'd like to add that we haven't covered?

JL: Just wondering if you'll be needing some artwork to adorn this article... or should I be in contact with Ian about that? Let me know.

SP!: What are your hobbies?

JL: I play music with Gypsy Bandwagon and also an informal group that meets weekly to jam—mostly old folk tunes (not because we're so into folk, but because most of those tunes can be played rather easily). Also have been composing my own music using GarageBand on my computer—probably not going to set the world on fire, but I'm pleased with the overall results. I also like to watch old science-fiction and monster films (Svengoolie and MST3K being among my favorites). I'm also an elder and teach Sunday School for my church, which involves writing my own notes (basically a short essay) almost every week. Don't know if I'd call that last one a hobby, and it's often harder work than the day job, but it is a change of pace, for sure. My wife and I live just minutes from the Blue Ridge Parkway and so, we try to get out and take afternoon hikes pretty often, but we would not be considered serious backpackers.

But really, my job is my hobby and vice-versa. So much time goes into doing the job, that I have to find moments of joy within it where they appear. Going to conventions and other events is "work" for me, but these also contain moments of recreation.

Weblinks:

http://www.jameslyle.net/

http://www.doormanonline.net/

http://www.drunkduck.com/DoorMan/

http://doorman.smackjeeves.com/

REVELATIONS

SNEAK PEEK!

THIS IS GOOD.
MAMA'S SECRET RECIPE.
THERE'S NO POISON OR DEAD PEOPLE IN IT, IS THERE?
NOT UNLESS SOMEBODY COMMITTED HARA-KIRI IN THE COMBINE HARVESTER WHEN THEY WERE FARMING IT.

SNEAK PEEK!
YOU SURE EAT A LOT FOR A STICK INSECT.
LET ME GUESS, YOUR TURN TO BE BAD COP?
Y'KNOW, IF YOU'RE GOING TO THROW IT UP AFTERWARDS, YOU MIGHT AS WELL LET ME HAVE THE LAST SLICE.
I FEEL FINE-- OH. FUNNY.
NATURALLY THIN. NATURALLY BLOND, TOO.
YEAH, SILICON VALLEY, YOU'RE ALL NATURAL.
SURPRISED YOUR BUDDY, ZAC, DIDN'T OFFER YOU A JOB IN HIS TITTY BAR.
SURPRISED YOU'D BREAK BREAD WITH AN ALLEGED MURDERER.

HERE AFTER PRESS

WHY'S YOUR LAWYER HERE, ANYWAY?
SOCIAL CALL.
DON'T WORRY, I HAVEN'T KILLED ANYONE, LATELY.
SOMETHING YOU WANT TO TELL US, ROLLINS?
YEAH, STOP CALLING MY OFFICE ASKING IF I'LL GIVE YOU EVIDENCE ON LANGFORD.

HERE
PRESS
SNEAK PEEK!
YOU HAVEN'T BEEN INTO YOUR OFFICE IN MONTHS.
WE WERE STARTING TO WONDER IF ONE OF YOUR CHARMING CLIENTS HAD KILLED YOU.
SABBATICAL.
UNLESS YOU'RE DESPERATE TO DO THE DISHES, YOU BEST BE RUNNING ALONG, DETECTIVES.
THAT WAS BEYOND STRANGE.
YEAH.
AND, THAT'S THE LAST TIME I'M BEING BAD COP.

By Mark Turner

Originally born out of an idea for 'Dead By Dawn Quarterly', Scar Comics is the creation of Shane Chebsey and Andy Richmond. Presenting some of the industry's best creator-owned material with a keen eye towards quality, SCAR Comics represents a publishing imprint standard for storytelling and excitement in an industry that does not always match their standards. Recently, Shane Chebsey, together with Pete Rogers (writer on the critically acclaimed The Interactives [AAM/Markosia] and the Eagle award-nominated title Eleventh Hours [Oban Urban Comics]) joined forces to sit down with SP! and talk a bit about the company and their latest joint effort, a sci-fi/steampunk adventure tale entitled Forgotten Planet.

SP!: What attracted Scar Comics to Forgotten Planet? What elements do you feel the titles that Scar Comics publish have in common?

SC: I just really liked the whole alternative history angle—the secret war on Pluto and the intrigue behind why it was declassified from planet status. I think the idea captures the imagination and gives the story a real edge. As a publisher, we only publish stories we'd like to read ourselves, so picking out Forgotten Planet was a no-brainer. It ticked all the boxes and I really liked Pete's work on The Interactives (a graphic novel he wrote for Markosia).

The one thing that all Scar Comics titles have in common is that they have their own identities and stand out from the crowd. We don't have a house style and we publish a variety of genres outside of the realms of some other publishers. We believe this gives creators opportunities to tell stories they might not be able to tell elsewhere. Hopefully, this means a breath of fresh air for our readers, too.

SP!: You have a solid pairing in Peter Rogers (writer) and Giancarlo Caracuzzo (artist). What made you decide to use this project for Scar Comics' first Kickstarter project?

SC: The main reason we took the Kickstarter route was that we wanted to be able to employ the talents of a top professional artist to do Pete's script justice. We wanted to give readers the best book we possibly could, both in terms of creative team and production values. As a small indie publisher with limited resources, we felt Kickstarter enabled us to do just that, as we could pay our artist an advance and bring out a hardback version of the book with some cool extras. It also gave us a chance to really engage with our readers and find out more about what they want to read and what they expect from us as a publisher.

SP!: Scar Comics features some really great work from talented teams. How do you compete in a field that is so crowded with other publishers looking to find favor in the public eye?

SC: The simple answer is that we don't compete. We find great stories and great creators and allow the work to find an audience. It's actually not that hard to stand out and find something different, as so many publishers only publish certain genres in certain art styles. So, when something unique like Madam Samurai or Falling Sky comes along, we usually find that there are people just waiting to read the books like that.

I think we'd be daft to try and

compete with some of the bigger publishers. They do their thing really well and have done for years, so we're happy to find new audiences to complement the usual fan bases.

SP!: In terms of the company's approach to creating comics, do you find that your material is tailored more toward an American or a European audience?

SC: We try not to second-guess our audience and prefer to stay true to our creators' own visions. However, I guess being in the middle of the two continents geographically

reflects our approach to what we like to publish. I think our books can appeal to both American and European readers, although Americans say we seem very European and the French say we are very American in our style.

To be honest, we are still working out whether or not that's a good or bad thing. We do sell in both parts of the world, so I'm erring on the side of good at the moment.

SP!: What do you feel is at the heart of good storytelling? What three things do you feel writers and artists who are trying to break into the industry are challenged by when it comes to this motto? What do you think is the one benchmark that many independent publishers fail to hit that ultimately hurts their efforts? Any words of advice?

SC: That's a complex question, so I'll try to give a simple answer. For me, good storytelling is putting communication before illustration. Personally, I always prefer artists who can tell a good story over those who spend time rendering details or showing off their ability to draw the perfect figures. Obviously, drawing ability is essential in comics, but I know many accomplished illustrators who can't draw a comic strip.

I don't think I can claim to be clever or wise enough to give advice to other publishers. After 19 years of publishing, I'm still learning new things every day. I think that's all I could really pass on: always be willing to learn and never think you know it all. Strive for professionalism and strive to produce the best quality books you can. Don't compromise your standards.

SP!: Shane, what made you want to get into comics? How did Scar Comics start?

SC: Well, I wanted to be a comic artist since I was a small child and I studied art for many years. In the end, I found I enjoyed the more collaborative role of editor and then found that being a publisher was more challenging and more interesting.

Scar Comics began when Andy Richmond and I wanted to publish a book together. We just needed an imprint so we put our initials together and came up with SCAR. You could say it was fate, if you believe in such things.

That book was a horror anthology called Dead by Dawn, which saw some writers and artists publishing their first work, as well as some old pros being let loose without the confines of a large publisher's editorial limitations.

The results were very satisfying and the anthology spawned three sequels and featured artists like Bryan Talbot, James Hodgkins, PJ Holden, and Al Davison. It gave us a great springboard to start publishing our graphic novels and we're still very proud of those books.

SP!: Peter, where did Forgotten Planet come from? What made you decide that Scar Comics was the best home for this particular project?

PR: The idea for Forgotten Planet spun out of the news story concerning Pluto losing its planet status, and the concept grew from there. The book isn't solely about Pluto being downgraded, but the impact of that decision is the catalyst for what happens next. I've done a lot of research on Pluto and every bit of information I gleaned has fueled more things to work into the book. I've enjoyed taking the real timeline and creating a fictitious one to overlay, meaning that, although it's a science fiction story with an alien race in it, it is grounded and has its roots in reality.

Lots of stories tend to focus on the start of someone's career or the moment when they first do something heroic, but I wanted Forgotten Planet to be different from that. I gravitate to stories where the protagonist is experienced and has lived a full life; where it's as much about their past as their future. Books like Warren Ellis's and Cully Hamner's Red and films like Unforgiven—where someone is drawn back into a world of violence—fascinate me.

One of the reasons we're working with Scar Comics on the book is because Shane was so

enthused and passionate about the project from the moment I took him through the concept. He asked me all the questions I needed to answer to help shape the world and define the characters, without getting in the way of my own creative process. That's the sign of a good editor.

SP!: Peter, what elements do you feel are essential to crafting a story that appeals to an international audience?

PR: This isn't really something I've ever considered. I tend to write the stories that I want to write and that I'd like to read. For me, a good story is one where you care what happens, either to the main characters or to those who are impacted by the main characters. Where a story loses me is where things happen that don't have any emotional impact, where the plot and characters feel disconnected. That's true of novels, films, and TV shows as much as it is of comics. I'd like to think a good story transcends what country it comes from, and can be as universal as folk tales or stories passed down through the generations. Things like The Killing and Girl with the Dragon Tattoo are compelling stories, which only really needed to be remade because some people won't watch films with subtitles or without someone they recognize in them. The strength of the

story—even if not kept entirely identical—remains the same.

Most of the media I consume is American or British, but certainly not exclusively so. Lots of my favourite artists, including Giancarlo and people like Dan Panosian and Dylan Teague, have been working for French publishers. I need to brush up on my French, in case those books aren't translated. If the story and characters are compelling and the art is interesting, then it shouldn't matter where the creators or publisher come from.

SP!: How did you pair up with Giancarlo Caracuzzo on Forgotten Planet?

PR: I met Giancarlo online, like most of the artists I have worked with in the past. We got to chatting about potential projects and this seemed like the best fit for us. His track record speaks for itself and his style is really kinetic and full of energy, perfect for a science fiction book with plenty of action scenes in it.

I'm honored to be working with him. He's been paired with some big names before, like Jeff Parker, Jimmy Palmiotti, and Justin Gray, so I definitely feel the pressure of living up to his expectations in a collaborator.

SC: For me, Giancarlo was a perfect match with the story. I've been observing his work for some time and he can draw just about anything and has such an energetic style, together with a fluid storytelling ability that ensures the perfect synergy of action and characterization.

SP!: Peter, When scripting for a comic, do you tend to go with a full script or plot first (Marvel-style)?

PR: I've only ever done one script Marvel-style, which was for a short story called Seniors, working with Azim Akberali. We've collaborated together a number of times, so we each understood how the other liked to work. Because Azim was painting the pages, I wanted to give him complete freedom to bring the story to life. He did rough pencils first and then went about painting the story. It's still one of the things I'm most proud of in my work to date.

Usually, I work full script, although I am learning to write less-lengthy panel descriptions. I consider a script to be a way to let the artist into your story, so they understand it well enough to add their own take on things. As a true collaborator, they have as much input into what happens next as I do. Usually, when an artist suggests something different than what's on the page, it means the storytelling will be improved, which is always the most important thing.

SP!: Peter, what made you want to write comic books? Were there any particular creators that inspired you and sealed the deal in your mind?

PR: It's kind of odd that it took me so long to realize I wanted to write comic books, because as soon as I knew how to write, I was writing stories, and as soon as I learned to read, I was reading comics. When I was young, I actually wanted to draw comics, because I never quite realized someone actually wrote the stories separately. When I was about ten or eleven, I got How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way for Christmas and I used to copy pages from Tiger before that. I wasn't anywhere near good enough and drifted away from art, while continuing to read comics until I went to university.

After university, in the late 90s, I studied screenwriting at Raindance in London, including a course run by John Truby. I also applied for a masters degree in screenwriting at Cardiff University, but was told my work was too commercial! It was around this time that I began reading comics again, having bought some Marvel and DC titles on a beach holiday. I was soon back reading comics again in a big way, and it was at this point I started to realize that writing for comics was what I should have been doing all along.

I don't think any one creator was responsible, more the potential of the medium as a whole: its scope, the immediacy of the storytelling, and the potential for true collaboration. One of my biggest regrets is that I didn't start writing comics much earlier in life.

SP!: What else have you been working on?

PR: My own imprint/studio, Dapper Chimp Press, put out its first book earlier in the year—Chris Smith and the Nazi Zombies from Hell by first time writer Julian Burrett and artist Vik Bogdonavic (currently to be seen on Image Comics' Reality Check). I got to sit in the editor's seat for that project, which exercised a different set of muscles. The first issue is due on Comixology any day now.

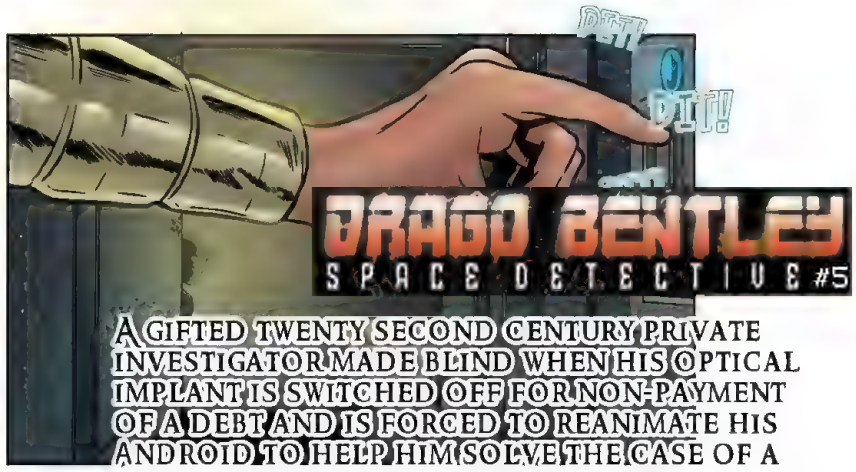
In October, Markosia released the British Comics Showcase anthology and I have a short story called Blood Dolls in the book, with art by Cheuk Po. I'm also developing a super-heroine miniseries with Cheuk, called 15-Minute Heroes. I have a oneshot coming out as part of the Unseen Shadows Universe. It's my second contribution to the world Barry Nugent created in his novel Fallen Heroes. It's a period piece set after the first Crusades called The Lament of Lady Mary, with art by Conor Boyle.

I and my Dapper Chimp Press co-founder Steve Aryan have been working on a time travel police procedural mini series called Flux, with artist Maysam Barza. That's currently under consideration from a couple of publishers. Steve and I have another series in pre-production, and I have about another three concepts that I'm discussing with artists, too. Along with these, I have a few stories due to be seen in anthology titles and there's a possibility Dapper Chimp will launch three different anthology books of our own in 2014. I'm definitely making up for lost time

SP!: Do you have any final words for our readers?

PR: We're really grateful for the support we've had so far for the Kickstarter campaign and hope the idea appeals to enough people that we're able to bring the book out this way. With Giancarlo Caracuzzo on board as the book's artist, alongside Azim Akberli who is doing the Kickstarter exclusive dust jacket cover, and pin up artists Chris Wildgoose (Porcelain) and industry legend Mike Collins (Transformers, Dr Who, X-Men), we know the book will look amazing. Everyone that hears about the book seems to really like the concept and the art, so we just need enough people to spread the word and make more people aware that Forgotten Planet exists.

SNEAK PEEK!



A GIFTED TWENTY SECOND CENTURY PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR MADE BLIND WHEN HIS OPTICAL IMPLANT IS SWITCHED OFF FOR NON-PAYMENT OF A DEBT AND IS FORCED TO REANIMATE HIS ANDROID TO HELP HIM SOLVE THE CASE OF A MISSING BILLIONAIRE, IN THE PROCESS EXPOSING THE TRUTH BEHIND A MILITANT GROUP OF HIGH LEVEL ANDROIDS AND A CORRUPT SENATOR HELL-BENT ON CONTROLLING THE WORLD.

COMING SOON EXCLUSIVELY TO CLOUD 9 COMIX ON IOS, ANDROID AND KINDLE FIRE

PASSPORT:
DRAGO
BENTLEY, JR
PRES
CONROY

SNEAK PEEK!
IT'S DONE. I'LL DEAL WITH CONROY NOW. AFTER THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS, I'LL DROP CAPTAIN REYNOLDS AT THE FORTY THIRD A TEASER TO LEAD HIM HERE.
YOU SHOULD KNOW, BENTLEY'S ANDROID LEFT WITH LUGGAGE-BENTLEY'S GOING SOMEWHERE.
COMING SOON EXCLUSIVELY TO CLOUD 9 COMIX ON IOS, ANDROID AND KINDLE FIRE
2

SNEAK PEEK!

COMPUTER - BEGIN PERLOG.

DOC FINISHED FIXING MY IMPLANTS AT 01:00.

ALL I REMEMBER IS MY HEAD FELT LIKE A DUCK IN A SHOOTING GALLERY. DOC SAID IT WAS NORMAL BUT HELL I AIN'T FELT NORMAL SINCE THE 5TH GRADE WHEN I HAD A CRUSH ON MY SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHER.

DON'T MATTER NOW ANYWAY 'CAUSE NOW I'VE GOT ZOOM, I-R, AND M-R-I ENHANCEMENTS INSTALLED.

ANYWAY, AFTER THE OP, I COULDN'T REST - REMNANTS OF THE RAPTURE, PROBABLY.

I HAD TO LOCATE KATIE COCHRAN, A-K-A MISSUS DELANEY BEFORE THE TRAIL GOT COLD. BUT THAT WAS PROVING AS EASY AS FINDING A ONE-TOED, BLACK-HAIRED MAN IN A SHANGHAI RUSH-HOUR.

ALL GUS HAD WAS A NOTE FROM HER THAT SAID:

THERE IS A LOT I NEED TO TELL YOU, BUT IT HAS TO BE IN PERSON. MEET ME AT THE LUDLOW, ROOM 301 TOMORROW NIGHT AT EIGHT.

THE LUDLOW.

ONE OF THOSE HOTELS IN THE WORKING CLASS DISTRICT; WHERE YOU WIND UP BEING HIT ON THE HEAD WITH A NIGHT STICK AND WAKE IN A HEAP OF VOMIT AND RATS EATING AT YOUR FACE-IF YOU WAKE UP AT ALL.

WHORES. NEVER COULD READ 'EM. IT'S WHY I TURNED DOWN VICE IN FAVOR OF HOMICIDE.

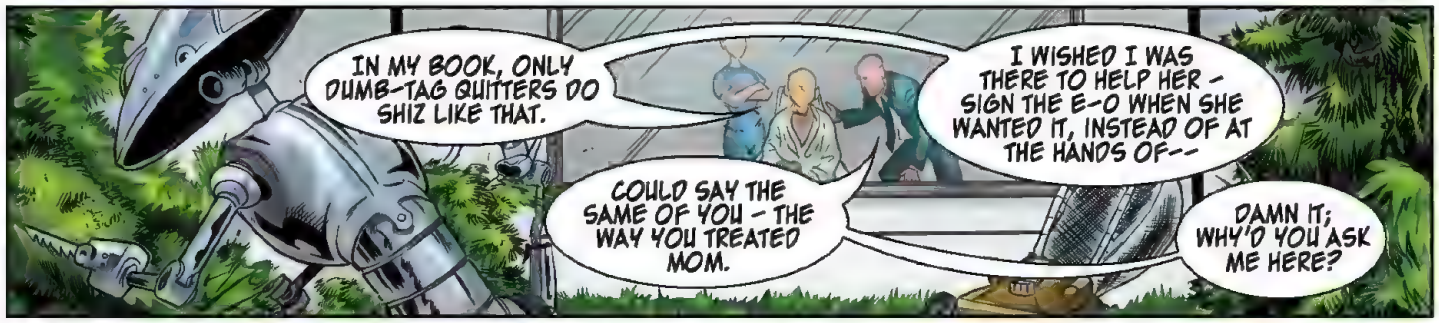
ANYWAY, I DON'T KNOW IF IT WAS THE BOOZE, THE RAPTURE OR THEY HAD ME MISTAKEN FOR A WOUNDED VET, BUT DAMES SURE SEEMED INTERESTED IN ME FOR SOME REASON - NOT THAT I CARED.

BARS ARE ALWAYS GREAT PLACES TO DO RESEARCH ON TALL LEGGY BLONDES. AND THEN NEAR DAWN I REMEMBERED I HAD TO DO ONE THING...

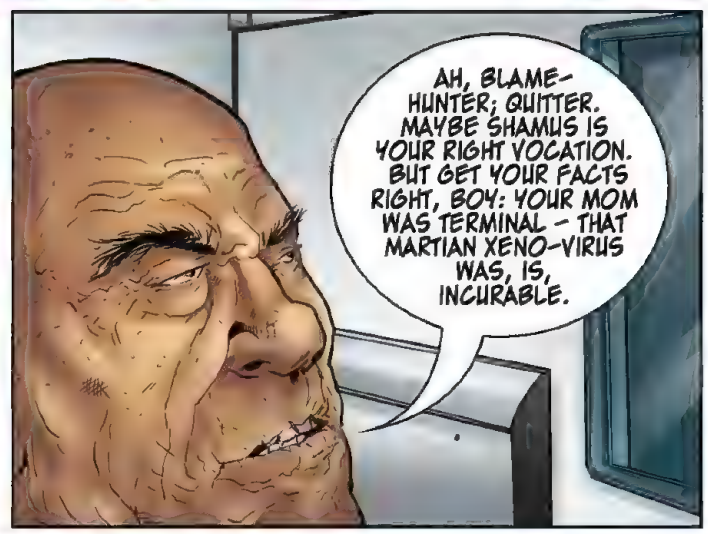
3

COMING SOON EXCLUSIVELY TO CLOUD 9 COMIX ON IOS, ANDROID AND KINDLE FIRE

SUNRISE. BEEN UP MOST OF THE DAY; PUMPED WITH BARBS; PLIED WITH BOOZE; SHOT AT; BEATEN, INJURED – HELL, IT WAS ALMOST LIKE I WAS BACK IN THE WAR.
HAPPY DRAGON RETIREMENT VILLAGE
SEEING AS YOU'RE GOING OFF WORLD... HE GETS UP WITH THE BIRDS.
SEEIN' POP THERE ALL ALONE BROUGHT BACK THE MEMORIES... NOT ALL GOOD.
VITALS'RE STABLE... FOR NOW.
HE NEEDS A CAPMAC HEART PROSTHETIC AND NEURAL CHELATION OR THE DOCTOR SAYS HE WON'T LAST A WEEK. SORRY.
HOW MUCH IS ALL THAT?
I TOLD ACCOUNTS I'LL SORT IT.
TWO HUNDRED, MINIMUM. THEN THERE'S SONIA SINGH'S MEDICAL COSTS THAT YOU'RE BEHIND ON.
DIDN'T RAISE MY SON TO BE A QUITTER.
WAY I REMEMBER IT, POP, YOU DIDN'T RAISE ME AT ALL.
TOO INTERESTED IN BEING A COP AND THE BOTTOM OF A GIN BOTTLE AT GUS'S.
AH, WHAT DO YOU KNOW? YOU GAVE UP OFFICER TRAINING WHEN IT WAS OFFERED TO YOU. AND FOR WHAT? TO BE A GRUNT IN THE ARMY?
MARINES – SPECIAL OPS.
GIVE ME A BREAK. YOU'RE A BORN LEADER – YOU KNOW IT, I KNOW IT – AND YOU MAKE THAT STUPID DECISION.
I GOT MY REASONS.
SNEAK PEEK!
COMING SOON EXCLUSIVELY TO CLOUD 9 COMIX ON IOS, ANDROID AND KINDLE FIRE
4


IN MY BOOK, ONLY DUMB-TAG QUITTERS DO SHIZ LIKE THAT.
I WISHED I WAS THERE TO HELP HER – SIGN THE E-O WHEN SHE WANTED IT, INSTEAD OF AT THE HANDS OF--
COULD SAY THE SAME OF YOU – THE WAY YOU TREATED MOM.
DAMN IT; WHY'D YOU ASK ME HERE?

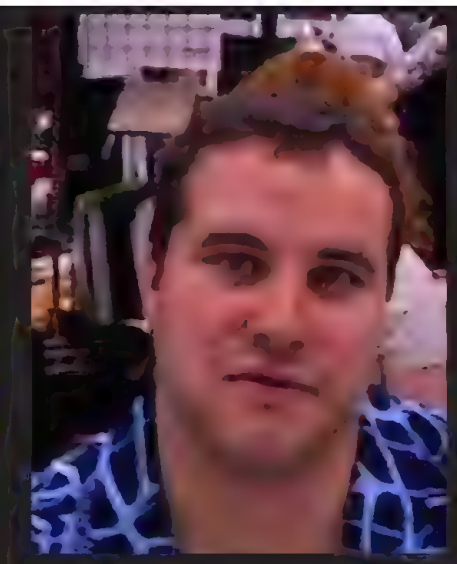
E-OS AIN'T ABOUT QUITTING. YOUR MOM WAS NO QUITTER, EITHER; BUT SHE HAD HER BACK AGAINST THE WALL. HELL, YOU KNOW; YOU BROUGHT IT HOME.
MY CROSS; I KNOW I'M TO BLAME.

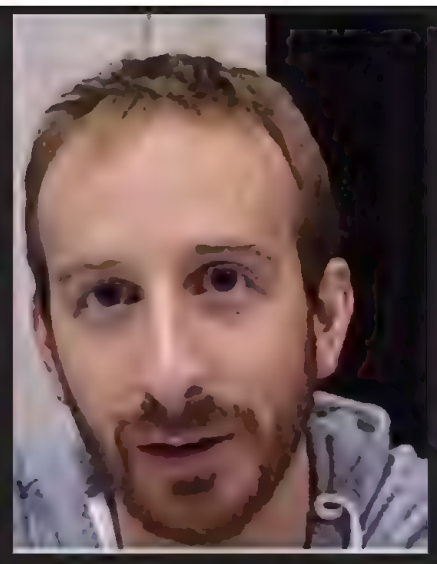

AH, BLAME-HUNTER; QUITTER. MAYBE SHAMUS IS YOUR RIGHT VOCATION. BUT GET YOUR FACTS RIGHT, BOY: YOUR MOM WAS TERMINAL – THAT MARTIAN XENO-VIRUS WAS, IS, INCURABLE.

SNEAK PEEK!

5

COMING SOON EXCLUSIVELY TO CLOUD 9 COMIX ON IOS, ANDROID AND KINDLE FIRE





By Ellen Fleischer

Every summer, at the end of August, the city of Toronto plays host to Fan Expo Canada. Beginning in 1994 as The Canadian National Comic Book Expo, this four-day event has grown steadily over the last 19 years, expanding its mandate to include anime (1998), Science Fiction (1999), Horror (2004), Gaming (2005), and this year—for the first time—Sports.

For another "first," this year, Fan Expo Canada rented both the North and South buildings of the Metro Toronto Convention Centre (approximately 750,000 square feet in total), the better to accommodate over 100,000 attending fans, over 900 retailers, artists and exhibitors, and over 300 celebrity or professional guests—including the likes of Carrie Fisher, Ian MacDiarmid, Stan Lee, Neal Adams, Hulk Hogan, and Tony Fernandez, among many others.

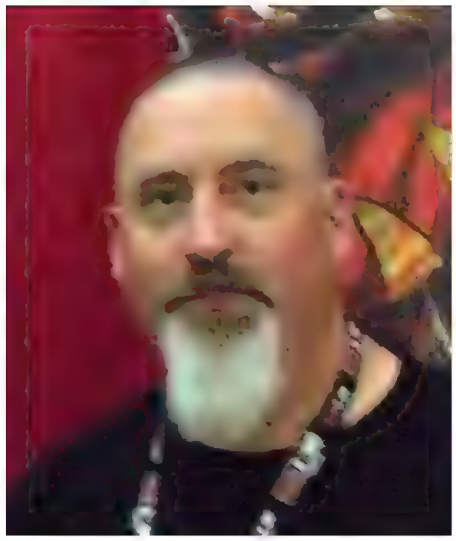
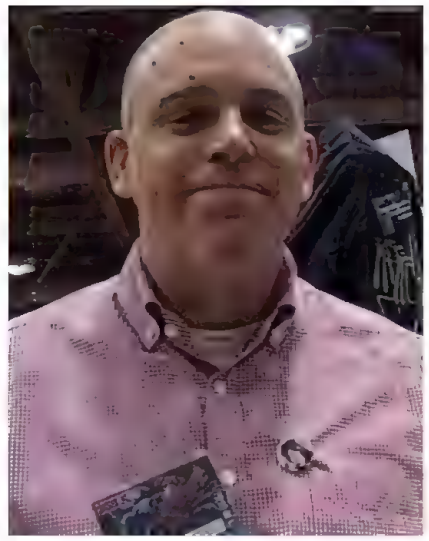
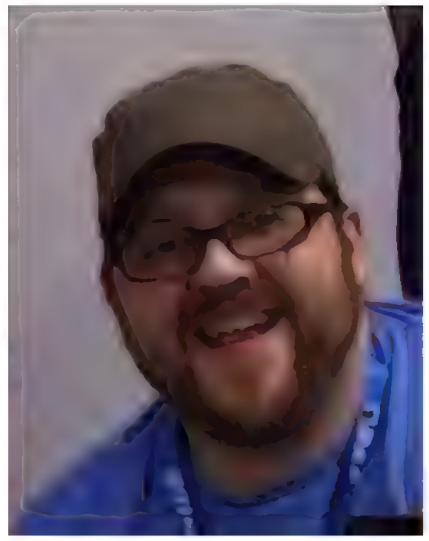
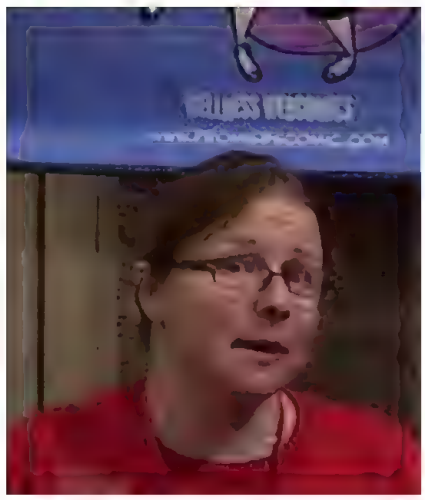
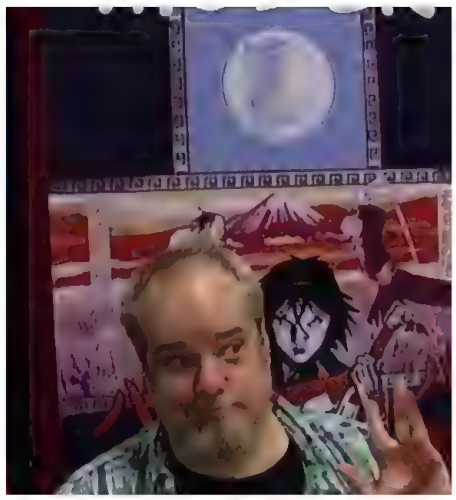
In Artist Alley, many indie and mainstream creators sat side by side. Perhaps, this isn't so surprising. As Becky Cloonan pointed out, there isn't always a great divide between independent and mainstream (or "signed") creators. She should know. Since 2002, she's worked for the "Big Two," (becoming the first female artist to draw an issue of the main Batman title), Image, Dark Horse, and a number of smaller presses like Cyberosia and Cactus Fusion. Her table—adjacent to Steven Niles's—boasted a display of her latest self-published comic, Demeter. "There are a lot of mainstream artists crossing over," she continued. When I spoke with her on Friday, her comic was selling well, the fans were friendly, and she was having a great time.

Jay Fosgitt agreed with that assessment. This was his first year at Fan Expo, though he also exhibited at Toronto Comicon in March. "Cons in general can be hit or miss with indie comics," he said. "Sometimes people just show up at the other cons because they want to see the big names or see the Big Three, but in my experience… if you're an artist that someone likes, it doesn't matter if you're indie or if you're mainstream; they're going to come to you—so I'm having some tremendous response to my work here, which is one of the main reasons I like coming back to Toronto for conventions; the fans here are just incredible." Fosgitt was in Toronto to promote his self-published comics, Bodie Troll and Dead Duck.

Jay Jacot—who, in addition to promoting his own book, The Tao of Snarky, worked with Fosgitt on Bodie Troll—was also enthusiastic. While he's done other cons, such as C2E2, Motor City, Detroit Fanfare, and Mid-Ohio, this was his first time in Toronto. When asked how he rated the indie experience at Fan Expo, he said, "Absolutely fantastic. I've had great response to my art. My art is here, so that way I can show off the art for all the people and I can tell them about the book. If they enjoy the concept of the book, they end up thinking of reading it. It's a really, really good experience for anyone to get feedback."

J.R (Julie) Faulkner was back for her fifth time with collected editions of her webcomic, Promises, Promises. She usually has a great experience at the show and noted that the business has picked up in the last two years. While she does other cons, as a former Toronto local, Fan Expo is her main one.

Ian Herring expressed similar sentiments. While he rarely

attends cons outside of Toronto, he's found that because he comes back every year, people recognize him and have been more likely to buy his art.

Fan Expo veteran Tara Tallon (Galaxion) has been attending off and on since 1995. Asked about how she finds the indie experience in general, she replied, "The selection of people interested in reading [my comic] is a small selection, but it's really gratifying to come across someone that says 'ooh! That looks great!' and be able to sell them. It's a niche thing, but I suppose that's true of a lot of things here. Not everyone is a fan of horror, but there are enough here who are to make it worthwhile, and I guess that's the same for me."

Meanwhile, Anthony Ruttgaizer and Lee Moder were generating awareness for the crowdfunding of their upcoming comic, F1rst Hero, (at Indiegogo until October 17th). While they'd attended Fan Expo many times in the past, this year marked their first time behind the table. When asked how they were finding things, they replied," So far so good. People are coming around, they're inquisitive. Artist Alley is larger than it's ever been, and everyone's side by side.

Gordon Shipperbottom of Poorman Comics was hawking the first release of his self-published comic, Red Squirrel. When asked how he was finding his business, his reply was "Fantastic!"

It wasn't all good news, unfortunately. This year, most celebrity signings were held in the North building, while Artist Alley remained in the South. While in past years, con-goers intent on obtaining celebrity autographs and photo ops often passed through Artist Alley on their way to the signing area, that wasn't true this time. Moreover, with more artists, exhibitors and vendors, some artists felt like they were getting lost in the shuffle. Then again, with so much on display, artist Guy H.L. likely wasn't alone when he admitted that he was probably spending more than he earned. Still, he was quick to say that he was having tons of fun.

At another table, indie writer Jewel Katz was promoting her new book, Diztabled Princess (published through Marvelous Spirit Press), a webcomic collection about "a zany, quirky woman with a physical disability." When asked about how she was finding the indie experience, she replied, "It's great!"

Kevin Bolk made the trip up from Baltimore, MD to show off his collection of comics art and self-published parody comics, such as "Ensign Sue Must Die!" (co-authored with Clare Moseley). Fan Expo wasn't his first con, but it was his biggest. "There are a lot of things to see here that you don't get to see on the East Coast in the US. It's a great chance to meet new people. Business has been excellent." He plans to be back in future.

And Sunday, when I caught up with Cory Reid, creator of Reform School Ninja Girls, and asked him how he'd found the Fan Expo experience, he said, "It's been a blast. I think we're going to sell out today. It's been chaotic at times, but I've had a great time."

The next Toronto Fan Expo is scheduled for August 28–31, 2014.

REVIEWS

Policy: Self Publisher! will print reviews from just about any source available. It is our hope that you will get an idea if a book is worth pursuing and, hopefully, go out of your way to get it. Our review system is managed online, so if you want anything reviewed, you will need to at least be able to send an e-mail —although our reviewers are authorized to collect things for review in person. Our reviewers should have cards or copies of SP! to show that they are indeed who they say they are. Our reviewers are instructed to review for the READER, not the CREATOR... so, we are sorry if a reviewer does not give a review that would boost your sales. Reviewers are ranked and given clout by reader votes online and we won't print reviews for long from someone if people don't find them useful. That said, we also instruct our reviewers to give constructive feedback and not be mean. Everyone starts somewhere and SP! is set up to be one of the first places a publisher may get a real review. Join our team! If you wish to have YOUR reviews featured in these pages, we would love to add you to our reviewers list!

OUR REVIEWERS Ian Shires (IS)—Ian@dimestoreproductions.com & Liam Webb (LW)-liamwebb@hotmail.com

ARCANA STUDIOS

Steampunk Originals Vol. 1

100pg full color anthology. First printing 2012. Written and drawn by 45 contributors; edited by Mike Schneider.

STEAMPUNK ORIGINALS
Well, looks like the connecting rod snapped.
Don't worry, folks! I'll get it back up and running... good as new
NO!!!

Available at: http://www.arcana.com/

Review: I'd just like to mention that I noted the art of the story first, separated the color and line art mentally second, read the story third, and then looked at the title. I did it in this manner in order to avoid seeing the names of any contributor, so that this could be as "double-blind" and objective a review as possible. Even when reading the titles I tilted back with my glasses off to avoid reading the contributor's names. I only included contributors' names below when the story warranted such (whether for very good or very bad reasons) and I went back to get the names after the comments were already made.

**Transparency note: I myself have pitched a story to them which will (if done within time) be included in their fifth volume.

Terra Nullius: Art is overly shaded and the style could use better proportions. The letterer made some very strange choices by putting the speech in square boxes and using quotation marks, not speech balloons when there was only one person in the story. It was too short to make any point and was a very "A to B" idea. Art is not good. Forgettable.

Rule Britannia, The Messenger: Interesting ideas, good art and appropriate lettering. The British slang was laid on very thickly by one of the characters, though. Overall, not a bad read. Art is very well done.

Impulse Action: Feels like an intro, but includes the trope of the evil businessman and evil military. Art is middling or just above that. Forgettable.

End of Bushido: Art is middling, however I noticed these supposed Japanese characters looked extraordinarily European. I got the feeling there was a larger idea behind this story, but it was unclear just exactly what it was—almost as if this was a scene cut from a larger book. There are some uppercase typos in this story.

Graveyard Shift: Good art, good coloring, more cartoony style. Just two pages, just one idea, and again, it uses the "businessmen are bad" trope.

Gladiatrix: Again, uses bad British accents. Art is all right. Not a bad idea, though it unfortunately tips its hat to Wonder Woman and thereby shades it as a steampunk derivative and not a true original.

Unconventional Conventions: The art is very good. Nice story about comic book fandom in a steampunk world. Very charming story.

Eye of Mumbouli: Decent art, good idea, nice little comic ending, but in a steampunk anthology which has other stories playing up a Victorian female ideal, the Lara Croft-inspired character seems out of place.

Lost City: Art is distractingly bad. Balloons out of order, typos in the balloons. Forgettable and a cut below everything else so far.

Steaming Pile: Decent art. Font choice makes the words hard to read. The font is off-kilter and had it been used for just the revenge-minded character it could have added character, but since it was used for every letter in the story, it had no such effect; it simply made it hard to read. Simple revenge idea is pedestrian and a murder in the middle makes no real sense.

Bait: Art is different from what you find in most comics, but in a good way. More typos. A nice story, good action, ends on a laugh. Very good.

Vow: Art very good. A great zombie story. Great emotion, pacing and story. I wish there had been more of this.

Punching up the Act: The art fit the story and there was a nice page design on the edges. It was disturbing, which was the point, but I don't see how this story was supposed to be a commentary on anything. Also, the whole thing was written in verse, which was a bit unexpected.

Diwali: The art is excellent. This is an interesting take on terrorism in a steampunk society. Though, since this was also written in verse and put just after another verse-piece, I felt it would have been better put elsewhere.

Eleanor's Arm: Art is 7 out of 10. The style is a bit different, but it isn't badly done, and the coloring is very good. But there are more typos. Still, a very good story about friendship and dedication. As a story, it was one of the better ones in the book.

Blocks: Very good art, more expected out of an art book or an artistic, Vertigo-type comic than a standard comic book. It has a "floating" quality without words, and the end reveal is almost a bit sad, which is a good thing.

Marketplace Karma: The art style is more fluid and cartoony, and that's fine. It has a nice ending with realized characters, though the snobby shopkeeper was thin (on purpose). A nice little moral story.

Gargoyles: The art is very good, but very bizarre and it doesn't look like it fits the rest of the book, nor a comic book in general. It definitely doesn't fit the steampunk idea, at least, not in any way that I can see, except maybe the visual design on some of the characters, but as I've said, it is so "out there" that it doesn't really matter. It isn't a bad story at all; it just doesn't seem to belong in the book.

The back of the book states that steampunk should take a critical look at society, but some of these stories don't really do that. The final story, as visually beautiful as it was, does not, nor do Blocks, Eleanor's Arm, Punching Up the Act, Bait, Steaming Pile, Lost City, Eye of Mumbouli, End of Bushido, or Terra Nullius, and some others though they show a good alternate society (The Messenger, Marketplace Karma and Diwali), don't really critique our society per se. The others do, to differing extents, but one wonders why the ones that don't were included, or what their supposed critique of today's world is. This is definitely lost (if it was ever there). There were two instances of the "evil worker-abusing boss" in this book, which I wish hadn't been included, because the idea is so old it is a trope and it does not help in today's society to add one more log to the current culture war in America of rich versus poor (or just middle class) that certain political parties and their television networks are pushing right now. Heck, if a story explored why someone was a "good boss" in a steampunk world, that would be more of a critical look at society than most of the stories currently included. There is very little direct social commentary in these stories, though part of me is grateful for that, since doing that is always tricky and can easily become preachy.

The writing quality ranged from very good to highly unclear however, some of that might be due to the page-count restraints on some of the stories. I hesitate to opine that any writing was truly "bad," because many of them were too short to really see "bad" writing come to the fore, though there were some individual ideas in some contributions (like the "worker-abusing boss") that were truly unoriginal.

The art quality varied wildly in this book, ranging from excellent to rather poor. But more distracting and more important to me, were the vast differences in font sizes and typefaces. I would hope that for their future volumes, the editors make a standard font size for the participants and/or make the letterers conform to the same perceived visual size, since some stories had comparably large fonts and others quite small.

And while I do understand that doing a project like this on deadline is taxing to even the most organized individual or group (I was an executive editor years ago on a project of similar size), I was quite unpleasantly to find typos throughout the book. Some obviously just had better letterers than others, but coming across both comma misuse and multiple spelling errors from an established publisher was disconcerting. But again, the first of anything can be a learning curve and I wish everyone involved the best in catching the spelling errors next time.

Like any anthology, it was an uneven read, but on the whole, it stuck to its general idea and style (even if that idea wasn't the one listed on the back of the book) and there are some very good artists and writers exhibiting their work in this book, from whom I hope to see more in the future.

On the whole, it wasn't a bad book. At about 100 pages, you definitely got a lot of breadth from today's comic creators, however while some stories shone, other stories just sat there. I truly appreciate what they are trying to do and wish them the best as they progress with the series.—LW

ARCANA STUDIOS

Steampunk Originals Vol. 2

105pg full color anthology. First printing 2012. Written and drawn by 50 contributors; edited by Mike Schneider.

Available at: http://www.arcana.com/

Review: I'd just like to mention that I noted the art of the story first, separated the color and line art mentally second, read the story third, and then looked at the title. I did it in this manner in order to avoid seeing the names of any contributor, so that this could be as "double-blind" and objective a review as possible. Even when reading the titles I tilted back with my glasses off to avoid reading the contributor's names. I only included contributors' names below when the story warranted such (whether for very good or very bad reasons) and I went back to get the names after the comments were already made.

**Transparency note: I myself have pitched a story to them which will (if done within time) be included in their fifth volume.

A Little McKay Goes a Long Way: The art is good, if a bit dark in spots (visually, not thematically). Having personally read a lot of Winsor McKay's Little Nemo, I think it fell short of his detailed, sweeping vistas, but the fanciful aspect was there. Not bad, if a bit direct in action. There is no social commentary present at all.

Forged in Pride: The art is spectacular. Some characterization is too direct and one sentence reads badly. The story makes a good point though, and while it is complete as-is, it does leave the door open for later stories in a good way. There is commentary about a rich man's arrogance here, but not on society.

A Day of Birth: The art is very good. The writing is awkward at one point, with one character stating, "indoctrinate these youth". You don't talk like that unless you're quickly trying to make a point as a writer. Also, one panel has a balloon stem going to no speaker, or at least, the wrong speaker. This story is trying to make a point about colonialism and while the writing is refined, it is a very old point.

Falling in Love: The art is different. I would call it serviceable, and the coloring is very nice. The faces could be a bit better rendered. The story is a pun on the title and simply shows an act of violence and the covering of the crime. Again, there is no comment on larger society here.

When Pigs Fly: The art is okay, and it has a good coloring job. The writing doesn't let the reader in on the subject of the discussion between the characters until four pages in—and that isn't intriguing, it is annoying. There is a confusing scene change on page 3, proving that some aspiring comics writers still don't understand that comics are not and never will be films. This is a bad story for two reasons. One, the main character seems too modern in demeanor for the time/society they are trying to show. Two: it is essentially hateful towards Christianity and lazily relies on stereotypes to say "the church is bad, misogynistic, and wants to kill those that disagree with them". This is a social point that has been made far too many times by hateful liberals in the American media and I, unfortunately, am seeing it again. I greatly dislike condoned hate propaganda when trying to relax in fiction. I have three things to say to this writer, Travis Olson: Shame on you; you are a bad writer and worse person for spreading hate; and I dare you to write the same story point about violent radical Muslims (or even the Hindu caste system, which people are still fighting to this day),but I am almost sure you wouldn't, since those items aren't approved in your liberal oh-so-tolerant-and-accepting marching orders, even though radical Muslims do horribly violent things to women right now, not 400 years ago in the Salem Witch Trials, which you had to s-t-r-e-t-c-h to reuse here. Please do yourself a favor and look at the faces in the link below, you prejudiced hateful person, and then seriously ask yourself why you have been brainwashed into spreading hate (through what you likely call "story" and not "propaganda" with a straight face) about Christians so thoroughly that you intimate they are just as bad or worse than this:

The Freedom Fighter's Journal: THE MUSLIM ACID BATH

Pristine: The art is serviceable, but the color effects (shines and shadows) are noticeable to the eye. The color effects aren't "wrong," but they do stand out—which isn't a good thing. There is also comma misuse. The story was complete and well done. Again, it made a point, but the point was about people in general (separate from anything new steampunk could add to it) and not on society or social functions, per se.

The Conservatory: The art and coloring is excellent. The story is short (three pages), but complete, with decent characterization through dialogue. It has a good reveal at the end and this story feels like there was more to it than a few other stories, even longer ones.

The Case of The Doll Man: The line art is better than middling, but it works and sets the mood well. The coloring is good and the coloring effects don't shout out their presence. I think it's the coloring which raises the art up on the whole. The lettering choices were good and helped the mood as well. Upon first look, I could tell the villain was a villain, but I also got a strong feeling of Dr. Sivana from DC's Captain Marvel (though maybe they were both drawing on Nosferatu's Max Shreck). The pages showing the victims were disturbing (which, ultimately, was a good thing) but I did not expect this in this book, going by the stories which led up to this one (nor from reading the first volume), and find myself wishing there was some information about this graphic departure (pardon the pun) prior to this story for the audience to use. It told the whole story, did it very well, and had a creepy postscript to boot. This story was incredibly good, and stayed with me afterward the way a good, disturbing story should stay with you, though I'm hoping the next story is a happy one, just to "refresh" me. Hearty congratulations to Edgardo Granel-Ruiz, Dominic Black, Lindsay Branen, and Magnus, who deserve to have their names mentioned for such a great product.

The White Cliffs of Home: Line art is good, coloring is excellent. It is very short; it just makes one "reveal," so there's not much to say here. But on reflection, using steampunk technology to power a spacecraft seems like pushing credulity, even for this genre.

Caught in a Jam: The art isn't very good. I think it tries to be stylized, but comes off as less than that. The art has too many extraneous lines, some lines that should be straight on buildings aren't, and the perspective on some elements seems off. The first panel on the second page has a square that is presumably a label for "powdered mutton," but it isn't attached to anything and it looks like a text box, at first. It should have been caught by editorial. The story just made no sense, had no comment on society whatsoever, and no real relation to steampunk at all, since a guy going to get jam and then being eaten by the jam could have taken place in a variety of genres (horror being best, but even then I don't know).

Bulldog: This single page commentary has more social commentary in it than the last three stories together. This gets to the point of what the back of the book says better than most. The art is excellent. Bravo, David Chesonis!

Emperor's Prize: The art is middling and I feel the style might do better in another genre. The first text box should have ended in an ellipsis. The coloring and effects on the text boxes and the pages are good. There are noticeable effects in the panel composition and breaking panel borders which are both good. One or two more misused commas and an ellipsis missing a dot. The dialog is a bit stiff, but I liked this story overall, despite its minor flaws. It likely would have been more fun and breezy (which is the impression that I got the writer had in mind), if the dialogue were more natural and used some contractions.

Aerosmythe: This is a one-page entry and there are two serious typos in it: "dingy" for "dinghy" and "or" for "o'er," which is rather inexcusable for a one-page submission. The font is hard to read and the coloring effects are trying too hard and almost fight with the line art (the line art isn't bad). This didn't make any sense, however, and it didn't show that there was anything underneath it either (like other short stories and even one-pagers in this book did), and I don't think it was due to lack of space. However, I am grateful for its brevity, because I don't think I could take more bad rhyming. You'd think the writer would have learned why DC's demon never does well in his own series (and this prose isn't as good).

Antediluvean: The art is "different." Not necessarily bad, but I don't know if I would read a continuing series with this kind of art. By page 2, I wondered if this writer has seen "Urinetown," which is the same idea. Then again, I'm not sure if it would be worse if I knew whether he had. Though overall, this is not a far-fetched idea, since in real history, the British used to charge the Irish for how much sunlight came into their homes. The reading order on the last panel of the third page is confusing. Not a bad idea, not a bad short, but I felt it could have been more, which is a good thing.

The Crystal Kill: The art and coloring are very good. Nice nod to the EC creators. On the third page, a different man is called/referred to as "Graham" from the first page (and it continues, so I guess the first page was wrong). There are two words misspelled. This was an excellent story from start to finish. It captured the frustration and fear of a creeping problem and it used steampunk in it, but didn't overuse it. I'm not sure it commented on society in a way a non-steampunk story could have done, and at that, I believe it was just a comment on nature versus technology and the problems when the latter infects the former, but all in all, that's okay. Very well done.

Letters from Abroad: The art and coloring are excellent. Good news, everyone, it's a Futurama reference! Though only a one-page story, it was filled with promise, character, and I would like to see more.

The Clockwork Man: The art and coloring are very good. The second page uses a comma coupled with an ellipsis. This has a comment on society which is very well done. It has shades of Frankenstein in it and thought it is short, it makes a good point (possibly the point is good due to the story's brevity).

Humorous Pictorials: It has professional-level art, a nice nod to a newspaper's comics section, and ends up either funny or amusing, which is appreciated. The "Alice and Dinah" gag is especially good and cutting. However, I noticed the "Dine at Joseph's" ad gag was used on a dirigible in the last volume.

Overall, this was a very uneven book. I also noticed, unfortunately, that there were once again misspellings and grammatical errors (as there were in Vol. 1 of this series), and ith surprised me that they weren't caught and corrected. The art ran the gamut, as anthologies tend to, however one thing that really sticks with me is that most of these stories don't fulfill the "social commentary" promised on the back cover. Not that there is anything wrong with that in individual stories, but I think Arcana would be well-advised to not use that tag line on the book in the future, if it isn't really explored in the stories themselves. Some stories have no discernible social commentary at all, which is forgivable however, one story bordered on religious hate speech, which isn't.

The work, to me, ends up a bit confusing as a whole. While anthologies generally have a theme, there is no noticeable theme running through this book, since steampunk is a style and not a theme. The book has different genres throughout and they aren't grouped together by theme (horror, comedy, etc) in sections, which I believe results in a lost opportunity to help organize and even market the book. Some stories are very good (Forged in Pride, Case of the Dollman, Crystal Kill) and others, for various reasons, are very much not (When Pigs Fly, Caught in a Jam, Aerosymthe).

Some stories in this book are memorable in a positive way and great advertisements for their creators (like Dollman and Crystal Kill) however, on the whole, I'm not sure if this was a memorable book or great advertisement for Arcana as a publisher. That is, of course, less necessary for them, as they have plenty of other good works and their reputation isn't on the line per se with this one book however, the varying qualities of the stories, from a publisher such as this, is worthy of note in itself for review purposes. But again, that is the pitfall of anthologies made by voluntary outside submissions on a deadline. —LW

JESUS NARVAES

The Rejects #1

24pg, B&W with B&W cover (minor coloring on cover). Full size single issue electronic and POD comic book (#1 of 12). First printing 2013. Written by Jesús Narvaez, art by Randy Valiente.

Available at: http://indyplanet.com/store/product_info.php?products_id=8426

Review: I am sorry to say it, but by all means, avoid this book.

The sentences in the book are awkwardly constructed and hard to read. I get the feeling that the writer might know what he wants to say, but he certainly doesn't know how to say it, nor does he have a good ear for natural-sounding dialogue or, at times, the basic rules of English. There are many extraneous clauses and telegraphing sentences, which repeatedly break the old adage of "show, don't tell" to the point of irreparability. The fact that the main character, Jane, doesn't even have a last name, says volumes about what the story leaves out and what the creators should have thought about, but didn't.

There are also multiple typos in this book, both in grammar in and spelling. The most unintentionally funny typo is on page 5, when a character states, "It's enough that I am [sic] covering you [sic] ass with all the mistakes which you are making." Oh, the irony....

This book is written so poorly that it could lead a reader to suspect that the script was actually written in a language other than English and later run through Google Translate as an afterthought.

But these writing errors are mercifully, if oddly, broken up by multiple silent panels and even wholly silent pages. However, this gives the book an uneven pace. Reading naturally speeds up without dialogue on a multi-panel page, and I found myself shifting from 65 mph to 10 mph reading-wise, back and forth, back and forth, which detracted from the experience.

Without color, when the text transitions from narrator on the first page to internal dialogue on the fourth page (with no dialogue in between), it is jarring and confusing, though the internal dialogue stays consistent from there on in.

The most confusing silent portion is on pages 7 and 8 when, due to a lack of color, dialogue, or sound effect of any kind, it wasn't immediately clear that the thieves were found out and I had no idea at first

why the two were suddenly in the sewer (let alone how they got there from the stairwell they were just in when last we saw them). Upon second look, I figured out that they had been discovered by a guard on a monitor and the cops were outside the building, but it wasn't clear, because the guard seeing them wasn't clear and, perplexingly, when the creators showed the arrival of the police, it was the first time the artist showed the outside of the building and I had no idea what building the cops were at. These pages come across as completely disjointed on first look.

On page 10, the thief/romantic couple discusses their "successful" robbery, but we just saw that they didn't steal anything in the previous scene, unless the writer is writing in past tense when he should be writing in future tense?? I am so very confused by now. Next, the final panel on page 10 and first three panels of page 11 read like the pitch of the story and not like dialogue in said story. To be blunt, if I were not reading this for a review, but just as a reader, I would have stopped by this page, if not by the utter confusion of pages 7 and 8. Being brutally honest, I felt an instinctual sense of relief on page 12 upon seeing that there was no dialogue, and an instinctual cringe at the incredibly wordy balloons upon seeing page 17, and that says a lot about this work.

The art is fair at first glance (5 out of 10 if I were forced to give it a number), but there are some noticeable mistakes in the details, perspectives, and consistencies on most pages, which serve to pull a reader out of the story. Besides this, there were grainy lines on the pages (and I only looked at this at 100% zoom), reminiscent of the copies you get from public library photocopiers. I wasn't sure at first if this was done on purpose to go for a certain effect, but I don't think the grainy effect was used to set the mood, simply because it is present through the work, and not just for selected scenes.

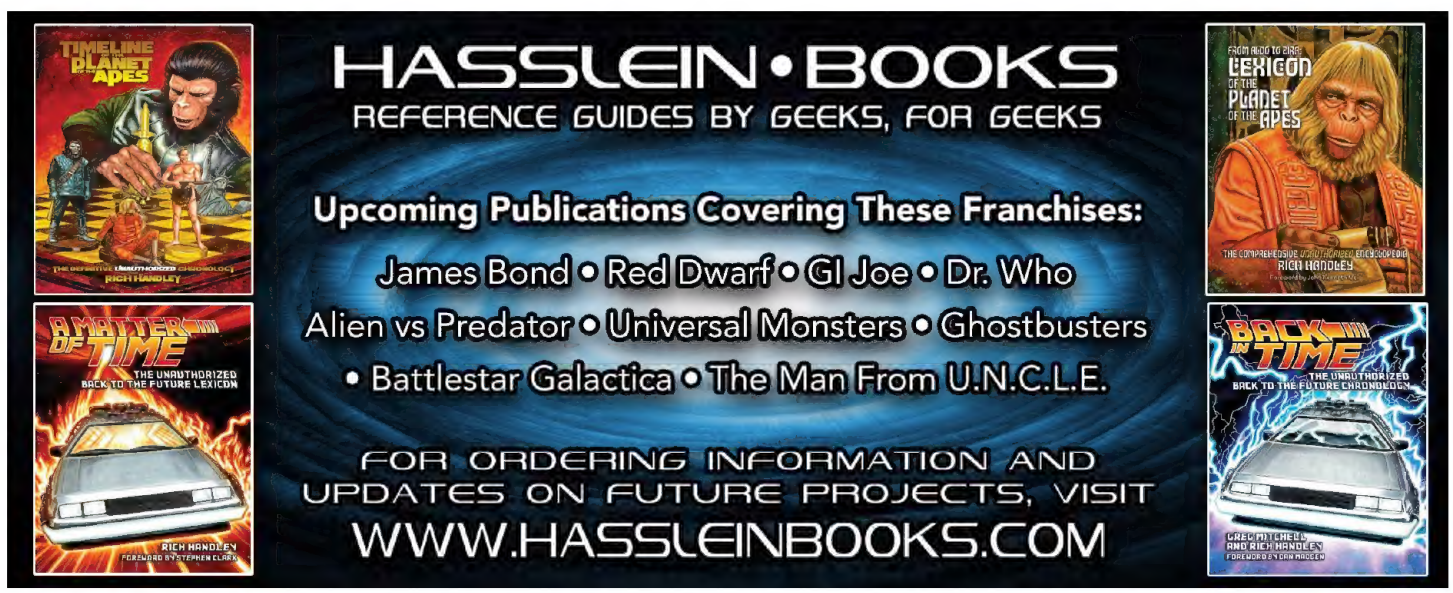
The story concepts in this book are only half-written, but perplexingly, whenever any storyline action is written in, it is done in the most expository and overly-explained way. The book gives us no information about what the opening scene was all about, nor how it relates to anything else. After the first pages, it becomes just a story about a robbery, and a muddy, poorly-written story, at that. I would say the characters are flat, but I can't—because that would imply there is any characterization here to speak of, and there simply isn't, outside of the one fact that Jane loves her partner Sean, which, actually, isn't character either; just a motivation.

I find myself wondering at how the text was so incredibly poor and unedited in any way, because out of 24 story pages, a full 7 pages are completely silent and another 7 have 25 words or less. On a business note, asking $5 for a black and white book that is 1/3rd silent and another 1/3rd nearly silent is outrageous.

The book doesn't set up unanswered questions that would intrigue the reader; it would just confuse and frustrate the reader. But I say "would," because after finishing the book, I simply do not care about the opening—which tried to be intriguing, but ended up being completely unnecessary—nor about any of the characters-without-any-character.

It is unfortunate, but The Rejects #1 is, in my opinion, a good example of what to avoid doing in making a comic, incoherent and, in short, absolutely dreadful.

One final note is that while this book is up on IndyPlanet, it currently (as of 10.11.13) says it is a color book, yet the interior is absolutely black and white. So, if anyone would like to purchase this offering, please be advised of that. —LW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UcreateComics.com: A new platform for comic creation

By Ellen Fleischer

UcreateComics is an online comic book community dedicated to comic book development. Armed with a Million Dollar Fund, they accept all concept pitches, put them to member votes, and then award comic book development deals of up to $50,000. It's a training ground for aspiring writers and artists to compete for paying contracts: a place where fans, artists, and writers can pitch their ideas, have them evaluated by their peers, and, should their idea pass muster, see those ideas realized.

The site is the brainchild of Donald Lanouette (founder, creative director, and fund manager) and Doug Duncan (CEO, president, and fund manager). Lanouette was part of the group that founded Night Wynd Comics (later Aircel Comics), which became one of North America's largest independent comic book publishers in the 1980s. He subsequently moved into television and publishing and managed both creative and production teams. Duncan has an extensive background in software and entertainment industry startups. He's worn many entrepreneurial hats, worked as a merchant banker, and been a successful restauranteur. The two men met on a charity climb to the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro.

Like Kickstarter and Indiegogo, UcreateComics is able to generate hype, interest, and awareness in creator-owned projects, but the resemblance ends there. Crowdfunding platforms are set up so that creators pitch projects and ask for money from investors who are also purchasers. Conversely, UcreateComics.com provides both the money to produce a product and the expertise to take it to the finish line. They begin with a graphic novel. Then, if enough fans like the idea, they'll approach television, movie studios, gaming companies, and merchandisers. On crowdfunding sites, creators get their funding and then need to figure out how to do the rest of it for themselves. UcreateComics.com understands how to do that "rest".

Aspiring creators needn't assemble a full creative team before proposing their ideas. If you're an artist who can't write or a writer who can't draw, you can still pitch. "You should have some sort of a graphic design to capture fan votes," suggests Duncan, "but if you don't have any skills and you win—[meaning that] the fans pick you; they liked your idea—we'll hold a secondary competition among our artist or writer members to actually do the production. We will pay them the page rate."

These page rates vary according to the page count of the comic or graphic novel, the skill level of the contractor, and the number of votes received. For 2013, page rates are:

Pencillers $75–$125

Inkers $35–$75

Colourists $35–$75

Writers $40–$60

In addition to page rates, writers and artists receive royalty percentages on sales of the finished work (typically 2 percent).

Creators retain 100 percent of their copyright and own 20 percent of the commercialization rights for eight years, after which time the rights revert back to them in full. Original scripts and art remain their sole properties.

Site membership at UcreateComics.com is open to all and offered at three different levels. Fans join free of charge and can look at art and scripts. They are also able to pitch ideas at $15.00 per pitch. Aspiring artists and writers also join for free. Like fans, they can pitch ideas and they can also compete in the SUITZ competition, upload writing and art portfolios on their wall, and can upgrade to Freelancer members when they wish. Freelancer members are artists and writers with paid memberships. Paid membership privileges include one free monthly pitch and a $10.00 fee for each additional pitch per month. They also

allow access to mentoring sessions with high-level comic book professionals, such as Neal Adams. Moreover, freelancers compete for professional contracts, and receive their own portfolio wall and online store. All members, whether paid or unpaid, have full voting rights in UcreateComics competitions.

UcreateComics isn't out to challenge established comic book companies like Marvel or Dark Horse. Their goals are to help aspiring creators make their first success and help those creators establish fan bases.

They entertain pitches from all comic genres, from action to romance and from steampunk to westerns. Superheroes are welcome, too.

UcreateComics is currently running two contests. The first is a writer's competition. "We have a comic called SUITZ," explains Duncan. "What we're asking is that our writers write a contest around our product. Our premise is that four suits are delivered to four people—four unsuspecting, unknowing people, in a common situation. The suits don't reveal themselves to the individuals until they're alone." It falls to the writer to create the characters who will be receiving the suits. They determine the personalities, backstories, and powers conferred by the suits.

"In one story," Duncan continues, "the characters are four students. One of the suits has every superpower that you can imagine and the guy who gets it has a bit of an ego and that guy goes off on a tear. And he's going to take over the world. But the suits leave after 48 hours. So now he's left with the aftermath."

The contest grand prize is a one-issue comic writing contract from UcreateComics, which pays $1000, in addition to a full suite of Write Brothers writing software. The winning script will be illustrated by UcreateComics in-house artist Steve Legge and distributed by UcreateComics. The winner also receives a 20 percent royalty on the comic issue and a one-year Freelancer membership with UcreateComics. Write Brothers software packages will be awarded to two runners-up.

The second contest is the Pitch 100. Creators are invited to pitch their ideas, which are then reviewed by UcreateComics editorial team. The top one hundred pitches will be presented to the site members for voting. "We're asking for two paragraphs," Duncan explains, "like an elevator pitch. If you can't do it, we have to move on. We have a hundred for them to read. So, if you do win, we have a $50,000 deal. $25,000 of that amount is split between the writer and the artist. If you're doing both, you'll get the full $25,000. So, you're being paid to produce. It's like you've got a job with us." The other $25,000 goes for commercialization. Duncan is quick to clarify that creators retain all rights to their work. "You keep your ID. You sign a deal with us for 8 years for commercialization. We'll do a graphic novel right away. You'll get 20% across the board. This includes comic books, TV, film, games, merchandise, etc."

In months to come, UcreateComics will be sponsoring seminars with artists and writers at comic cons across North America. They'll be sharing their experience in making it in the comic book business and offer valuable tips for today's aspiring creators.

To find out more:

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